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Smokejumper Magazine, April 2008

National Smokejumper Association

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THE NATIONAL SMOKEJUMPER
ASSOCIATION

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE
APRIL 2008

SMOKEJUMPER



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Message from the President



by Doug Houston
(Redmond '73)
PRESIDENT

It's JUST AMAZING THAT another year has gone by so fast, and we're into 2008. I can't speak for all of you, but it seems like it's going a little too fast for this boy. It's a good ride so I guess we'll just see what this new year brings.

The new year has already brought me a special book written by Bill Furman (NCSB-62) titled "Conversations With My Mother." The package also included a DVD of interviews by jumpers/friends of Hal Weinmann (NCSB-47, past NCSB and Redmond jumper foreman, who died not too long after the September reunion. The book was filled with interviews with Bill's mom, Dorothy, who married Hal in 1959, raising five boys, and living the smokejumper experience for years both in Winthrop and in Redmond. I was fortunate to be hired by Hal in 1973, and then took over his position at RAC in 1980 (training/operations foreman) when he retired. Hal was a true leader who enjoyed his job and life, and I have a lot of fond memories of his volley-

ball talents on the court of glory. In those days we played hours of volleyball when we were on standby, led by Hal. He is missed. Dorothy is fighting for her life battling cancer, and I wish her and the family all of the best. The book was a passionate tribute to her Hal, and the entire family and I thank Bill for letting me be a part of those memories.

I also want to wish Don Brennan (NCSB-54) the best for 2008. D.B. is a walking tattooed mural of smokejumping and firefighting. He has sat through hours of needle pricking, but the artwork of Smokey Bear, airplanes, parachutes, fire, tributes to the fallen, and more, is really well done. Don was a little under the weather at the reunion and I wish him a healthy year. He has an interesting story of being interviewed by the FBI, being a "person of interest" in the DB Cooper highjacking, especially with his parachuting background. We'll probably never know?

Paige and I also want to wish Sara Brown (RAC-2003), who was injured in New Mexico last summer, a full recovery. We know she is still undergoing rehab and has a ways to go. Hang in there, Sara.

With that, the NSA board has meetings scheduled in Hamilton, Montana, McCall, Idaho, and Redmond, Oregon. Check the magazine for dates, and we welcome all of you to attend and see how the great minds work for you.

Until next time, there's 100 yards of drift, you are hooked up, your arm is clear, and the whole world is a jump spot. Enjoy the ride..... 🪂

South Fork of the Snow River

by Jerry S. Dixon (McCall '71)

Looking at the gorge near the headwaters of the South Fork of the Snow River put my heart in my throat. Jim Craig and I were flying a Cessna 182 over the glacier that is the headwaters of the South Fork and Nellie Juan drainage. After plunging out of the glacier, the stream heads west and drops into a narrow gorge with waterfalls and logjams.

The South Fork is a beautiful salmon stream that flows into the Snow River, 15 miles north of Seward, to form the part of the headwaters of the Kenai River. Awesome glacier-draped peaks rise from the valley floor with names like Tiehacker, Eva and Goat Mountain. The Iditarod trail runs several miles up the South Fork before turning south to cross a pass and drop down near Bear Lake near Seward.

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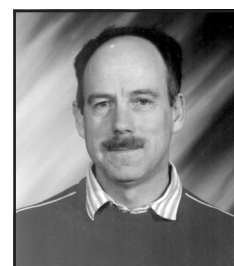
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Smokejumper base abbreviations:

Anchorage	ANC	Grangeville	GAC	Missoula	MSO
Boise	NIFC	Idaho City	IDC	Redding	RDD
Cave Junction	CJ	La Grande	LGD	Redmond	RAC
Fairbanks	FBX	McCall	MYC	West Yellowstone	WYS
				Winthrop	NCSB

During the winter the water in the stream is as clear as gin. Now it is running at medium high and it is opaque with glacier silt. It has been high most of the summer from record high temperatures and retreating glaciers. I have been flying it for a month trying to gauge the best time to run this river as I can find no record of it being run before.



Jerry Dixon (NSA file)

Rich Taylor and I hike up the river on September 9, 2005, carrying our Alpacka rafts. Rich is a river guide from England who worked in Jackson Hole and ran the Grand Canyon with friends and me last summer. Although he has never paddled a backpack raft before, he is an expert boater.

There are brown bear tracks everywhere. At one point there is a trail in the river bank that has been pounded down by many brown bears passing through. Two days previous we watched a brown bear and cub cross the Harding Ice Field to Skilak Glacier. We make lots of noise as we ford the river and push through the alders.

We hike up to within a mile of where the river narrows and becomes Class III. Above that it is Class IV. There is one Class V section and then the river turns east and enters the Class VI gorge. Rich is young and near the wild heart of life; he wants to push higher. Last year in the AMWC Eureka to Talkeetna race, I flipped in a rapid right above the gorge. I swam to shore just above the entrance to the canyon. Bushwhacking down the canyon I fell, dislocated my shoulder and was rescued by the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group. I tell Rich that running the South Fork would be exciting with logs across the river and whole trees in the stream and that I didn't have the shoulder strength now to do the pushy sections up higher.

The South Fork is a magnificent float with spectacular peaks like Sheep Mountain rising from the Snow River plain. Several years ago I traversed Sheep Mountain with friends and was surprised to find a glacier that straddled the summit like a saddle. The climbing log on top showed just four summit parties in forty years. What magnificent wild country so close to a road.

I first saw the Kenai River in 1967 as a teenager just arriving in Alaska to fight fire. In 1969 I fought two fires on the Kenai Peninsula; the Swanson River Fire was 500,000 acres and burned through a portion of Soldotna, and earlier that summer I worked the Russian River Fire. While waiting for a helicopter shuttle, we found out that it had crashed and killed a young firefighter named Mark Westover. Twenty six years later, when I hiked from Seward to Hope

across the Kenai, I came upon a sign that talked about the fire but nothing about the young firefighter that died. After ten years, and having worked with three district rangers and several FMO's, a memorial sign is now in place.

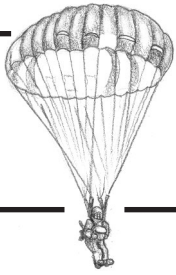
Coming around one river bend, we paddled vigorously to avoid what I thought was a submerged tree. It turned out to be a large metal bar about neck height in the stream. It was a piece of junk left by a large truck. How sad. Tire tracks of a "monster truck" crossed the South Fork in many places. There were two of these huge trucks at the Seward Highway access point. They come up the South Fork to play in this world class fisheries. Only in Alaska could someone trash a stream like that

and call it "traditional." At the take out there is much garbage where people have camped and partied. There is no oversight and little enforcement when it comes to playing in Alaska's salmon streams with motorized vehicles.

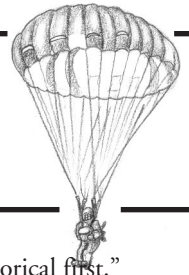
Bald eagles soared above us and perched on trees as we floated past. Moose tracks were ubiquitous. We had to pay close attention running the river as there were often trees that completely occluded a channel. The mountains were ablaze in colors, and every corner of the river brought a new vista. The South Fork of the Snow is one of the headwater streams of the Kenai and a priceless heritage. It should be protected as such. 🌲



Fairbanks 1996: Top L-R: Tracy Hall (RAC-95), Paige Houston (FBX-95), Rene Lamoreaux Robinson (RAC-89), Sandy Ahlstrom Romero (FBX-90). Bottom L-R: Brenda Guenzeler (MYC-90), Cynthia Lusk (RAC-87), Sarah Doebring (MSO-91), and Tiffan Thoele (RAC-95). (Courtesy P. Houston)



Odds and Ends



by Chuck Sheley

Congratulations and thanks to Floyd Bethke (MSO-61), John Pietras (MSO-73), Chris Wardle (Associate), John LeClair (McCall-77), Richard Graham (IDC-58) and Tom Thomas (NCSB-62), who just became our latest Life Members.

Although he is one of our "missing" jumpers, Al Kelley (MSO-53) was recently selected by the University of Montana to receive one of its Distinguished Alumni Awards. Al is professor emeritus of mathematics from the University of California, Santa Cruz.

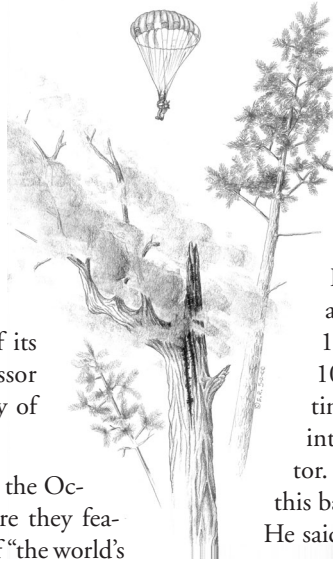
Pat Scheid (MSO-58) forwarded page 136 from the October 2008, issue of *Popular Mechanics* where they featured Jarrod Sayer (MYC-95) as having one of "the world's coolest jobs."

Jerry DeBruin (Associate): "Chuck, I want to thank you personally for printing the critique of *Rescue Dawn* in the recent issue of the *Smokejumper*. Because of your assistance, we may have made a dent in Herzog's presentation of Gene as a deranged individual in "*Rescue Dawn*." We now are preparing a piece in response to the DVD of "*Rescue Dawn*" which is supposedly out next month. Thank you again for your assistance in this humanitarian endeavor."

Ken Hessel (MYC-58) forwarded the following information: Wayne Webb (MYC-46) was inducted into the Idaho Aviation Hall of Fame in a ceremony held in Boise on November 6, 2007. In 1990, the new McCall parachute loft was designated the "Wayne R. Webb Parachute Loft."

An update on David Petteys (MSO-80): "I am currently a Fire Management Officer on the Plains/ Thompson Falls Ranger District on the Lolo N.F. and plan to retire March 2008 and continue to live in Thompson Falls."

Jerry Ogawa (MYC-67): "On July 14, 1991 at approximately 1400, a special occasion occurred on the Salmon National Forest when Twin Otter 141Z, with eight smokejumpers aboard, was dispatched to the Bear Basin Fire. On board were smokejumpers Rob Morrow (MYC-89) and Karen Dorris Morrow (GAC-89) who jumped a two-person stick on the same fire- the only married couple to ever jump a forest fire at the same time. We all jumped knowing that we had made a U.S. Forest Service first. The pilot was Marc "Andy" Anderson and the spotter was Eric "Brundo" Brundige (MYC-77). The historical aspect doesn't mean much to the average person, but I am sure all Forest Service employees, especially on the Payette National Forest,



can appreciate another historical first."

Got information from Charley Moseley (CJ-62) that Redmond will be hosting their first-ever reunion. Mark your calendars for September 19-21, 2008. Call Charley (918-448-5994) with any questions.

Bob Ingrum (MSO-59) in an email to Jerry DeBruin (Associate) concerning remembrances about Gene DeBruin (MSO-59): "In December of 1960, Gene and I went to Ketchum, Idaho, about 10 miles from the Sun Valley ski resort. We were sitting at the bar of a popular watering spot and got into an extended conversation with a local ski instructor. We naturally asked if Hemingway ever came into this bar, as we both knew he spent winters in Ketchum. He said, 'All the time,' and that he knew him well. 'Did we want to go by his home and say hello?' We jumped at the chance. The ski instructor drove us over to a big two-story home, went up to the front door, knocked and motioned to us to come on in. Hemingway was home alone, fixed all of us several drinks and was just as friendly as could be. He was very interested in our life-style (not a surprise). Gene and I were a couple of dudes in our twenties who had led pretty colorful lives and were used to all the attention smokejumpers get in the big mountain country. It was a swell evening with a gracious and very entertaining host."

Chuck Sheley (CJ-59): "I've got a bunch of past issues of *Smokejumper* magazine in my office and will be glad to send anyone who is interested copies of the following issues: October 2006, January 2007, April 2007, July 2007, October 2007 and January 2008. Let me know how many you want at no cost to you."

Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64) forwarded an article from the Associated Press dated Jan. 2, 2008. Apparently the FBI is renewing its attempt to identify D.B. Cooper. "The FBI said that while D.B. Cooper was originally thought to have been an experienced jumper, it has since concluded that was wrong, and that he almost certainly didn't survive the jump in the dark and rain." Johnny adds: "Although it is highly unlikely that D.B. Cooper will appear in Portland this June at the Air America Kickers Reunion, it's certain that a few D.B. look-alikes who will attend were actually the first to survive several jumps out the back of a Boeing 727 in the late 1960s in Thailand." 🐼

Commandos and Misery Whips

by Jack Ridgway (Cave Junction '61)

Chuck Sheley's (CJ-59) editorial about "Commando Day" in the April 2006 issue of *Smokeyjumper* reminded me that during our training at Cave Junction in 1960, every day was "Commando Day."

We had over 20 rookies in our class, and we outnumbered the old hands almost two to one. Norm Pawlowski (CJ-57) was our instructor and was nearly 100 percent pure muscle, often going shirtless to prove the point.

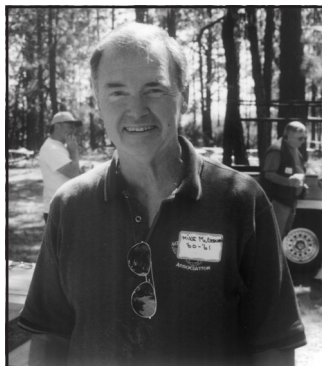
He could out-PT just about everyone in the class, especially in front and back pull-ups. There were a few challengers to Norm: Gary Welch (CJ-60) in weight lifting and Bill Oleson (CJ-60), who was a mini version of Norm. Eventually, we brought some pressure on the challengers to "lay-off," as the morning and afternoon workouts seemed shorter and less intense if Norm went unchallenged.

Norm was not only our PT guru, but was also an inexhaustible source of information on jump techniques and firefighting procedures. He often stressed the importance of retrieving our chutes, and we soon learned that should we ever return from a fire without our chutes, our jobs could be lost.

The following summer, Mike McCracken (CJ-60) and I had our first opportunity to jump on a three-manner with Norm, our "Jump God" and "Commando" leader. The fire was in the north country, probably on the Willamette National Forest, an area known for huge Douglas fir and tamarack trees. We packed our extra long letdown ropes, just in case, and set out on what promised to be a two or three day adventure, made even more adventurous because of the tall trees and Norm's presence.

The 40-50 minute flight to the fire was uneventful. The fire was putting out only a small puff of smoke, and Fred Cramer (CJ-59) spotted us into a small patch of reproduction a short distance from the fire. I landed in the reproduction and had about a 30-foot letdown. Norm also landed in the reproduction and had a letdown of about 50 feet. Mike must have hit the tallest tree in the area, and his letdown was at least 150 feet. It took awhile to find each other and get to a semi-clear area to signal we were all OK and ready for the cargo. The cargo drop was excellent and everything easily retrieved. We found the climbers, but could not find the climbing rope. In classic smokejumper fashion, we left the rope hunt for later and headed to fight the fire while it was still small.

It took only a few minutes to find the fire, a light-



Mike McCracken (NSA files)

ning strike burning in an old snag. We cut it down, had the fire out, and mopped-up in a couple of hours. Now it was time to retrieve the chutes. My retrieval was routine, requiring only the pruning saw. Norm had to use the climbers, but his retrieval was no problem. Obviously, Mike had a high climb and needed the climbing rope. We searched for the lost rope for over an hour, without success. Now the real work began. Mike's tree was a huge Doug fir nearly five foot in diameter.

Plan A: The bark was so thick and strong that Norm thought he could free-climb the 30 feet or so up to the first good branch by using the spurs and holding on to the bark. He got up to about 10 feet and decided Mike and I might be packing him out on a cargo chute stretcher if he proceeded any further. We made another search for the climbing rope. Still no success.

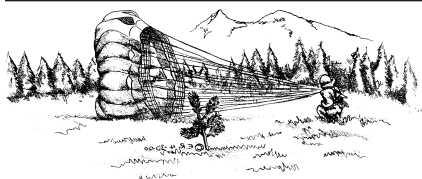
Plan B: Norm sacrificed a few cargo chute suspension lines and braided them together in an attempt to make a climbing rope. The braided line allowed Norm to get up about 15 feet, but then stretched to the point that Norm was leaning back at a 45-50 degree angle. Back down he came with Mike and me standing ready to catch him, or at least slow him down, should he fall. It was getting late, and we did not want to spend the night. Things were hot back at Cave Junction, and we definitely wanted to get back the next day in hopes of another jump. So, the experiments ceased and out came the final weapon.

Plan C: This was Mike's and my first and (thank God!) last use of a "misery whip" on an actual fire. Our training in the use of a crosscut saw had been minimal, and we were not fully prepared for this endeavor. It took a long time to establish the necessary rhythm, especially with someone you had never cut with before. The girth at our cutting level was over four feet and the spreading roots made a secure, balanced footing almost impossible.

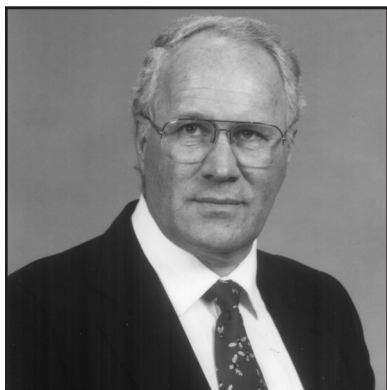
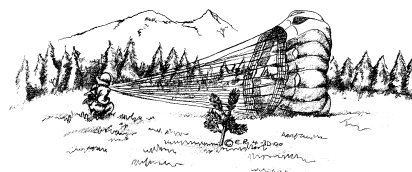
Eventually the tree fell, but hung-up in another tree. This went on a few more times, until we eventually retrieved the chute. Needless to say, the chute was in threads, and we had managed to cut down a few thousand board feet of potential lumber.

We packed up and had a short hike to a road, dropped our gear and headed to a Ranger Station for a good meal. The next day we were back on the Cave Junction jump list. We left it to Norm to explain to the loft crew the poor condition of the third chute. There were grumblings, but apparently his explanation was satisfactory.

Now, 45 years later, I still enjoy telling about this adventure as one of my more humorous jump stories. However, after 35 years in the building trades and looking at the high price of lumber, I wonder if there might have been a better way to save both the chute and those magnificent trees we were working to protect. 🌲



Checking the Canopy



Jim Cherry
(Missoula '64)

What Will Be Our Mark?

I'D LIKE TO SHARE AN allegory with you. I enjoy bow hunting for deer and gun hunting for turkey. As the season approaches I have a *vision* of a successful hunt and fresh meat for the freezer. I have *values*, too. I won't take a shot unless I can get a sure, quick kill, and I won't damage or destroy the habitat, nor will I be wasteful of the harvest. My vision and my values shape my *mission*. My mission includes getting my license, scouting the hunting area, setting up my tree stand, target practice, maintaining my equipment, and spending the time patiently waiting for the right shot... everything necessary for realizing my *end* objective.

These four words... *vision*, *values*, *mission* and *end*... relate to the challenges and opportunities that each of us face as we do our daily walk through life. These are also the challenges and opportunities we face with our National Smokejumper Association.

First, the NSA has a mission statement:

The National Smokejumper Association, through a cadre of volunteers and partnerships, is dedicated to preserving the history and lore of smokejumping, main-

taining and restoring our nation's forest and grassland resources, and responding to special needs of smokejumpers and their families.

Second, the NSA has values:

Comradeship, Education, Pride in work well done, Loyalty.

Unfortunately, we are lacking a *vision statement* and an *end statement*. The NSA Board of Directors put in long thought and hard work on developing the two statements that guide and direct the activities of the NSA, but we lack the two statements that lift our eyes from the immediate challenges and raise them to the far horizons where our vision can end in objective results.

Allow me to provide another example. I work part-time for the American Camp Association. The ACA has all four statements... vision, values, mission, and end statements. I'd like to share them with you so you can see how each one gives support to the other.

The ACA's Vision: **Enriching Lives, Changing the World**

The ACA's Values: **Contribution**
We believe that the camp experience is essential to every child's growth and education. Through our membership in the ACA, we contribute by working together to promote and articulate our association as a leading authority in child development. We contribute to the lives of the children and adults who participate in our programs and to their families and our communities, and, in turn, we encourage them to contribute to those who are part of their lives and to the world in which they live.

People-We believe in all the children and adults who come to our camps. They are the reason we exist. Through positive child development and partnering with parents, we encourage children to value their

uniqueness and to understand and appreciate their part in the larger community. We help children develop self-esteem, character, courage, responsibility, resourcefulness, and cooperation. Quality camp experiences help children develop the healthy emotional and social skills necessary to grow into strong, considerate, competent adults.

The World-We believe that each of us plays an important role in the stewardship of our environment, both natural and manmade. We help children grow into committed, responsible citizens by teaching them to appreciate, respect, and care for the world in which they live.

The ACA's Mission:

The mission of the American Camp Association is enriching the lives of children, youth and adults through the camp experience.

The ACA's End Statements:

*There will be greater public understanding of and support for the value of the camp experience.

*An increasing number of children, youth, and adults of all social, cultural, and economic groups will have a camp experience.

*The camp experience will be of high quality.

Now I have a challenge that I would like to place before the entire NSA membership on behalf of the NSA Board of Directors. The development of these statements... *vision*, *values*, *mission* and *end*... is extremely difficult work, and it cannot and should not be done by an individual or a small group without the input of a broader base of the membership. Therefore, I am asking for you to think about the *far horizon vision* and the *end results* of that vision that you have for your NSA. As our relatively small group of past and present smokejumpers, pilots and associate members face the graying of years and the passing

of our pioneers, what kind of mark do we want to make on the world around us? Struggle to put that thinking into the form of a *Vision*

Statement and an *End Statement* and then communicate those thoughts and dreams back to me so I can share them with our NSA BOD.

My contact information is: Jim Cherry, 2335 300th St – Ventura, IA 50482, 641-927-4428, jjcherry@peconet.net 📧

Marv Makes Smokejumping Seem Like Small Stuff

by Frank Fowler (Missoula '52)

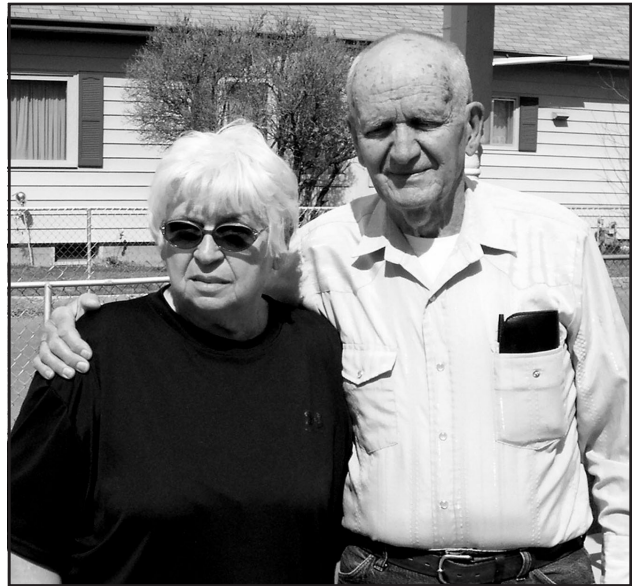
All of us, at one time or another, wonder what happened to “so-and-so.” Usually it’s interesting to hear about a long-lost jumper friend, but not very often are we surprised by their accomplishments because so many have done so well. Let me tell you about **Marv Amundson** (MSO-47).

I was in Butte, Montana, recently and bumped into Marv. In 1952 I met him when I rookied in Missoula. Marv was a squadleader and helped supervise our training. Twenty-seven years later, we met again when we worked together in the supervisor’s office of the Beaverhead National Forest. After his retirement in the early 1980s, his wife, Sally, died of cancer. In 1992, he remarried, but it wasn’t long before he and Joann left town, so I hadn’t seen him for 15 years. When I asked him what he had been up to since leaving Dillon, he said, “We’ve been pretty much occupied with the foster care program.”

I was frankly surprised because, at 83, that kind of endeavor seemed an unlikely pursuit. Joann is a bit younger, but still...taking care of little kids, and probably ones that have come into this world with more than their fair share of problems, seemed like a heavy load. Shortly after our meeting, I returned to Butte to pay them a visit. Here’s what I found.

Both Marv and Joann lost their spouses after raising their families. He had five children and she had four. When they married, Joann was working in a nursing home and involved in several other institutions. Joann obviously likes to tell the story about how Marv thought she was working too hard, so when he saw an ad seeking couples interested in helping with the foster care program, he showed it to Joanne, thinking it would be easier work. Joann laughed as she said, “Now here we are 15 years later, still up to our eyeballs with involvement in the foster care program, but not because it’s easy.”

They obviously love the work. I was amazed at the calmness reflected in their actions, even when the kids were demanding attention. There was a total absence of stress, at least as far as I was able to detect. “How many kids do you have in your home now?” I asked. “Seven. We have three foster care children, ages two, three and five and three that we have adopted, ages six, seven, and 12, and a 17-year-old girl who is with us under legal custody. She will leave when



Joann and Marv Amundson (Courtesy F. Fowler)

she is 18,” Marv added. “Six of our children are Indian and one is Hispanic, so I tell everybody I’m racist,” he says with a twinkle in his eye.

The foster care program is administered by Family Services and financed by state and federal funds. Joann said that since their involvement began in Dillon with an abandoned child in 1992, over 200 foster children have come through their home. For a while, they lived in Three Forks, Montana, to be close to Marv’s aging mother. When she died, they moved to Butte to be closer to supporting services, such as health care and special education.

Joann enthusiastically expounds on the great support they receive from the schools, Family Services, Family Outreach, speech therapists, occupational therapists, tutors, doctors, and the neighborhood. “And we mean it, when we say we get a lot more out of caring for these children than we put into it,” Joann says. Then she added, “But you have to keep a sense of humor.”

It was moving to hear them talk about the difficulty that many of the foster children have with Attachment Disorder or with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Many have a difficult time bonding, which in turn leads to many other problems. Their

foster care is supposedly short term, but sometimes it lasts a couple of years and, in the case of Angela, Cody and Brandon, it has lead to permanent residence since they are adopted.

In the course of our conversation, I spoke with Marv about his early years. He was raised in Glendive, Montana. When he graduated from high school, WWII was in full swing and Marv went into the service in the 4th Marine Raiders. They trained to operate behind the enemy lines with minimum support. Usually, however, they were used as the first wave to assault a beach. Their unit was split and they leapfrogged across the Pacific, systematically working their way towards Japan. He marvels at the fact that he lived through the action. For example, when they assaulted Okinawa everyone in his

300-man unit was either killed or injured except Marv and one other.

He said they had been told that there were four species of snakes on Okinawa and that two were poisonous. He well remembers a firefight his unit was engaged in that involved a lot of metal flying all around – bullets and shrapnel. “I was flat on my stomach firing at the enemy when I felt something in my right pant leg. I looked down and saw about five inches of a tail sticking out of my pant leg. I figured it was a snake and I wasn’t going to do a thing until that critter decided to come out on his own.” I couldn’t help but think this was the epitome of calm under fire.

Obviously, both Joann and Marv have both learned to not only live in the midst of adversity, but to thrive in it. What a team they make! Our hats are off to you both. 🧢

A Smokejumpers Memories

by Steve Culbertson (NCSB-63)

On a hot summer day, do you find yourself wishing you were poised in the door, ready again to accept the challenge of a wildfire?

Can you hear a siren and not remember that pulse-pounding race to suit up?

Do you see a plane taking off and remember the adrenalin rush of flying to a fire?

When you hear the drone of big piston engines, do you recall the smell of airplane exhaust and the rush of prop blast through an open door?

When you are standing in a quiet breeze do you recall the stillness after your chute opens?

When you smell smoke do you remember the urgency to get there and put it out?

When you see another firefighter, do you want to share with him that you too have been there and done that?

When you see a wildfire on the news, do you remember the heat, the sweat, and the fatigue?

As you fly across the West, are you unconsciously searching for good landing spots?

As you walk down a wooded trail, is the beauty of the wilderness still fresh in your mind?

Yeah, me too!

The View from Outside the Fence



by **Chris Sorensen**
(Associate)

A TIP OF THE HARD HAT to **Mark Corbet** (LGD-74) for locating the final resting place of PFC **Malvin L. Brown** (PNOR-45). When Mark's first article came out in the July 2006 issue of *Smokeyjumper*, I rooted around on the web and posted inquiries on a few genealogy web sites hoping to find something to pass along to Mark. A few people posted replies and tried to be helpful, but in the end I struck out. I mentioned my search to **Chuck Sheley** (CJ-59) at the Boise reunion, and we both agreed that it was probably going to take boots on the ground back east to locate PFC Brown's gravesite. I am happy that we have finally made a connection with PFC Brown's family and look forward to reading more in the future.

There is growing concern about Plum Creek Timber changing from a timber company to a real estate developer. Plum Creek is the largest private landowner in Montana, with 1.2 million acres in the state and more than 8 million acres nationwide. An economic research firm based in Bozeman, Montana, Headwaters Economics
<www.headwaterseconomics.org>

conducted an analysis of expected future firefighting costs if more of the land is developed
<www.headwaterseconomics.org/wildfire/>. Headwaters analyzed the numbers in the West including six Western Montana counties. In those six counties, the economists determined that Plum Creek owns half of the private land adjacent to public lands. In Missoula County the company owns 63 percent of the wildland-urban interface. "We have 1,300 square miles of undeveloped land in the wildland-urban interface in six western Montana counties," said Ray Rasker, Executive Director of Headwaters Economics. "Of that, 91 percent is still undeveloped. Plum Creek owns half of it. So you can imagine, if the company continues to sell to individual buyers, that's quite a bit of land where you now have to fight fire and protect homes." Economists such as Rasker see a future of cost shifting. "The Forest Service," he said, "will have to begin handing off firefighting costs to the states, and the states will in turn shift cost to individual counties. And that," Rasker said, "is when Plum Creek's land program finally and abruptly changes. Because the counties are the ones with the tools to control this," he said. "They have zoning laws and building codes, and they can say 'no.'" As soon as county commissioners are hit with additional firefighting costs on top of the existing costs of developing the wildland-urban interface, they'll start to look seriously at how they permit subdivisions, or even whether they'll permit subdivisions. This is going to make for some very interesting political battles in some of the fastest growing counties in the West. While Plum Creek is a private business and can do whatever it wants with its land, most counties are unable to provide services like road mainte-

nance, snow plowing, school buses, and police and fire protection. Many of these homes being built in the wildland-urban interface are the third and fourth homes of the ultra rich and are only occupied a few weeks a year. Plum Creek Timber's mission statement is, "We work to capture the most value from every acre that we own." Since 1999, the company has been a Real Estate Investment Trust; that means it pays no corporate income taxes in Montana.

Representative Barbara Cubin, R-Wyoming, is retiring from Congress this year due to her own health and the health of her husband. Representative Cubin has been a very good friend of the wildland firefighters during her tenure in Congress. Representative Cubin introduced the original Public Safety Officer Benefit bill for contract pilots. The bill has been reintroduced in both the House and Senate and has broad support. I ask all of you one more time to e-mail and call your Senators and Representatives and ask them to support this bill.

"I never *worry* about *action*, only inaction." - *Winston Churchill* 🦋

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The Gene Hobbs Incident

by Ashley Court (North Cascades '63)

Larry Longley (NCSB-72) put together an excellent book titled "Spittin' in the Wind," for the North Cascades reunion in September 2007. As part of that effort, Larry asked three different individuals involved in the horrible accident involving Gene Hobbs (IDC-61) to recount their remembrances of that July 1973 day. The first story is by assistant spotter Ashley Court (NCSB-63), who took over the plane after Gene was pulled out. The second is by Gary G. Johnson (FBX-74), who was on the rescue helicopter. The third is by Gene himself. All three are included below.

In late June and early July 1973, lightning hammered much of Alaska's interior and soon depleted Alaska's jumper crews. They requested reinforcements from the lower 48 states and eight of us were dispatched to the northlands. Our crew members included: Kirk Fraser (NCSB-70), Jerry Bushnell (NCSB-72), Jack Anusewicz (NCSB-72), Bill Bickers (NCSB-72), Mike Utigard (NCSB-71), Larry Longley, Baynard Buzzard (NCSB-69) and myself.

Upon arrival at Fairbanks, we quickly stowed our gear and reported for orientation. At orientation, we learned that despite the number of jumpers originally in Fairbanks, most were either on fires or being dispatched to jump on newer fires. Also, Fairbanks was short on spotters and, in a bit of bad news for me personally, I was to be assistant spotter for Gene Hobbs (IDC-61),

one of the Fairbanks' spotters, for the first go around. I hated to miss any opportunity for a fire jump, but I was definitely willing to help where I was needed, and I was assured I would later be placed on the jump list.

The only aircraft available to our crew was a DC-3, and ours had not seen recent jumper use. Because of this long layoff, Gene and the rest of our crew needed to load it with the necessary smokejumper materials. After loading we were to take our crew of jumpers, which included all the NCSB jumpers, to the small town of McGrath where there had been a great deal of fire activity.

As we took off from Fairbanks, the bottom latch on the back door came loose and actually opened a tiny bit. Both Gene and I grabbed the rear door and managed to put the bottom pin of the rear door roughly back in place. Although

there still was a little gap in the door, we managed to close the door enough so that we felt the hazard of it opening during flight was gone.

The remainder of our flight was uneventful, and soon we were on the ground in McGrath.

McGrath is a remote location. It is over 400 miles northwest of Anchorage and over 300 miles southwest of Fairbanks. Located at the intersection between the meandering Takotna and Kuskokwim Rivers, McGrath is in the deep interior of Alaska and yet is only roughly three hundred feet



(Courtesy L. Longley)

above sea level. Surrounded by the Alaskan tundra in amongst low rolling hills, the small town is a “major” stop on the Iditarod sled race.

We weren't long in McGrath before receiving a fire call. We flew north about 45 minutes and found two fires about a mile apart. Gene and I quickly surveyed the fires and decided to put four jumpers on each one. The streamers were in a box located opposite the open door. Gene and I were located near the rear door. At this point Gene passed the open door and started to grab some streamers from the box. As Gene passed in front of the door, his spotter's pack deployed. The events that followed happened in only seconds, but they are forever etched in the minds of those who witnessed it.

Gene's deployed chute was instantly sucked out the plane's open door. I looked towards the door but his parachute had already disappeared and the suspension lines quickly followed as the parachute opened up outside the plane. I looked back at Gene, while at the same time trying to get clear of the open door, as I knew he was about to follow the chute out the door. In a split second the lines came tight and Gene was jerked down onto the floor and towards the back corner of the door. His head crashed into the side of the plane and he landed heavily on his right shoulder.

Gene was wedged around the door with the parachute on the outside. The door began to crumple under the weight and pressure and finally folded back. His feet and legs violently crashed through the side of the front door and this narrow section of the door was ripped from its mountings and left trailing outside the aircraft. Although severely damaged, the rear door remained in place because of the upper door pins.

As Gene exited the aircraft, he clipped the side of my left leg and the back of my left hand resulting in nothing more than a slight bruise on my leg and a small cut on my hand. The split second that I had before Gene was jerked out of the plane possibly kept me from being injured much more seriously. Anything in his way would have either gone with him or been crushed by his velocity!

I immediately thought Gene had been killed! In my estimation, it was not humanly possible for someone to hit the side of that airplane as hard as he had, do as much damage to the airplane as he had, and live. My suspicions were confirmed when I looked out the door. He was hanging under a fully deployed parachute pointing away from the airplane, making no movement. I was sure he had suffered at least a broken neck, and he was nothing more than a corpse on his way to the ground. I grimly expressed this opinion to one of the jumpers who was standing at the door with me and he agreed.

Gene's exit from the aircraft was not seen by everyone. But everyone had noticed the tremendous crash that had jerked people to complete attention. For the most part, the jumpers in the front of the aircraft had not witnessed Gene's exit, and they were anxiously looking towards the rear and asking what had happened. Word spread quickly, and a small knot of jumpers gathered at the back door to try and watch Gene's descent. Because the pilots weren't yet aware of the situation, they were slow in getting the plane turned around, making it more difficult for the observers to watch

his landing. I immediately went to the front of the airplane to tell the pilot and co-pilot what had taken place and to have them radio for help.

I returned to the back of the airplane. Already one of the jumpers, who had been about to jump before the accident, had completely removed his jump gear and was noticeably shaken by the whole incident. He had no intention of jumping out of this plane. By this time, Gene was on the ground and, fortunately, he had not landed in any of the water. The smoke from the fires told us that there was a decent wind blowing, and he had landed with his chute stretched straight out behind him. It really did look to be a worse case scenario.

The plane circled around Gene and came back for a second time. Miraculously, he had moved ninety-degrees from his first position and was waving at us. Unbelievable! Gene was of average height, 5'10" or so, but he was very stocky. It was my understanding that he had been a boxer and a wrestler and, at this time, was the current wrestling coach and teacher at a school in Idaho. Like most jumpers, he was in great shape, having lived and maintained a life devoted to athletic fitness. I firmly believe those factors saved his life.

I later heard that after hitting the ground and regaining consciousness, his first thought was, “How the heck did I get down here?” He could remember getting ready to drop the jumpers and the next thing he knew he was on the ground looking up at the jump ship. He was asking himself, “What did I do wrong to get in this predicament?” He didn't find out until later that he had done nothing wrong, but was simply the victim of terrible timing and the failure of a pin in his spotter's pack to keep his parachute from deploying!

We assessed the situation and decided that it was out of the question to attempt to jump someone to aid Gene. The jump door was in ruins and there was the very real possibility that the rear door could come loose and fly off the plane. If this happened, there was a good possibility it could collide with the tail fin and bring down the entire plane. The co-pilot came back and, through a collective effort, we were able to secure the bottom of the rear door with some letdown rope.

Jack Anusewicz, a Vietnam veteran and EMT, literally begged me to let him jump and give aid to Gene, but I couldn't let him. The door was in such a mess that it definitely wasn't safe to try a static-line exit. The only option would be jumping, free falling a short distance, and deploying a reserve chute. Jack was more than willing to attempt this jump but, to me, this was completely out of the question. Now we went into a “circle and wait” mode. We needed to stay on site in order to assist the emergency helicopter in locating Gene, who was lying unconscious on the ground. The pilots kept our airspeed at a minimum in order to put less pressure on the door. Hopefully, this decreased speed, coupled with our “repairs,” would keep the door in place and allow us to stay in the area until the helicopter arrived.

During this time, we watched Gene, helplessly knowing that he was severely injured and in desperate need of first aid.

After watching his exit, I knew he must have a very serious neck injury and probably one or both of his legs were broken. He had moved upon landing but, as I recall, he made no more noticeable moves. We knew that in this Alaskan terrain, with innumerable small lakes within a short distance, that the mosquitoes had to be absolutely torturing him!

As we circled and waited, someone towards the front of the aircraft had their reserve chute pop and spill out onto the floor. Fortunately, this was far enough forward in the airplane that the others surrounding the jumper quickly corralled the canopy so there was no danger of it going out the door as well. This incident was an eerie flashback to the scene that we had just witnessed, and the somber plane ride became immediately even more tense.

After what seemed like an eternity, the helicopter arrived to tend to Gene. He had suffered head and shoulder injuries, as well as severe damage to both legs. There was little that they could do for him in the field, and they determined that the best course of action was to cut his parachute harness from his body rather than undo the buckles. In the rush to get him on board the helicopter and on his way to the hospital, the harness was forgotten and it ended up being left on the tundra. After the following day's interrogation, it was felt this would be a valuable piece of evidence and might reveal why the parachute accidentally deployed. Baynard Buzzard and I were dispatched back to the jump area but, despite several hours of looking, we could not locate the harness. The topography and terrain in that area were so similar it was impossible for us to pinpoint Gene's location. As a result, that valuable piece of evidence was never recovered.

In just a matter of minutes after arriving, the rescue crew had Gene braced, stabilized, loaded, and were on their way

back to McGrath. We also departed but, because of the condition of our jump door, we flew very slowly towards the McGrath area, landing at Tatalina only a few minutes before the rescue helicopter. After the helicopter arrived, Gene was quickly transferred to a fixed wing aircraft and flown to Anchorage for much needed medical attention. Although we were definitely glad to be back on the ground, we were extremely saddened by the trauma Gene had been subjected to.

Note: As one of the NCSB jumpers in the DC-3 at the time of the accident, I remember the scene like it was yesterday. Ashley did an excellent job of both writing this account of the accident, and taking over at the scene and managing the incident. I remember watching Gene drift down to the ground after the big "crash," as his body tore through the side of the door on the plane. His head and arms were hanging limp by his side. Most of us thought there was no way he could possibly be alive, especially after seeing the damage that the impact had done to the plane. We were encouraged when someone thought they had seen movement from him on the ground, and we watched intently through the pilot's binoculars. However, there was no sign of any further movement. At that point, I believe that most of us thought that Gene was dead. We had seen no signs of life, even with the plane making low passes to get a closer look.

I also remember that it was Baynard Buzzard's reserve chute that popped open in the plane a bit later in the episode. As Ashley stated, it was quickly covered up by several NCSB jumpers, who almost simultaneously dove onto the open nylon, as it began to slide around on the floor of the DC-3. At that time, we were all beginning to wonder if these parachutes we were wearing were a safety device or a death trap.

We are, of course, all so thankful that Gene survived.

—Larry Longley (NCSB '72). 🐼

In the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time - In the Right Place at the Right Time

by Gary Johnson (Fairbanks '74)



Gary Johnson 1974 (Courtesy G. Johnson)

In the wrong place at the wrong time, in the right place at the right time" is how it shook out for Gene

Hobbs (IDC-61) and me that fateful day in 1973 in McGrath, Alaska. It was the busy time of the season; the deep, throaty sound of PB4Ys hung in the air, the constant buzz of helicopters in and out permeated the skies. Crews lounged on the lawns and awaited their time to depart for fires in the bush. I had hoped to be a rookie smokejumper that summer, but it wasn't to be. I settled for a helitack safety and training officer position for the McGrath area. Smokejumpers were also busy demobing and then cycling back to new

fires. Somewhere during the course of the day, I had met Gene and remembered thinking how physically fit he looked. The fact that he was shorter, compact, and muscular, in my mind, is what saved Gene the day of his accident.

I can't remember exactly what I was doing at the time the call came in, but I was available and I had first aid experience. Details of the accident were sketchy, and all we really knew was that a smokejumper had fallen out of the airplane while setting up to jump a fire. We loaded some extra gear and

were off in short order. On the rescue helicopter were pilot, John Longstreet; helitack foreman, John Shroeder; **Don Whyde** (MSO-66) and myself. I remember Don and me talking about various scenarios of first aid with primary emphasis on neck and spinal injuries, while en route to the accident site. The trip seemed short, probably due to our adrenalin flowing. We circled Gene once, and then found a place to land that was safe from the fire and somewhat dry, probably about fifty yards or so from where Gene had landed. We took as much first aid gear as we could, including a stokes litter, on the first trip over.

Don and I were first on the scene, and my initial thought was that this jumper would not make it. His emergency chute was hung over some black spruce, and Gene's legs were both spread out in front of him. He was upright and half way leaning on the base of the black spruce. His fire shirt and Levi jeans were torn almost completely off. He was completely covered with mosquitoes and,

at first, seemed unconscious. We started first aid immediately. Gene must have heard us talking, because at that time he started to groan in pain and attempted to find out what had happened. This continued throughout the rescue. It took us some time to immobilize Gene and get him into the litter because the damage was so extensive. Obviously, he was bleeding and had several fractures that needed immediate care.

Don and I carried him back to the helicopter on the stokes litter – what an ordeal! The tundra and tussocks were definitely the “Boone and Crocket” type! In our haste to get Gene to a hospital, we had cut his harness off and left it in the field. I remember well that the emergency release handle was intact in its container – a fact that would be key in the investigation and litigation that followed.

We took Gene to the McGrath area where we loaded him into a Cessna 310 for his trip back to Anchorage. A nearby paramedic from Tatalina Air Force installation attended him on the

flight back. The DC-3 (BLM 645) was there; it was unbelievable the damage that Gene's body had done to the forward and rear portions of the door. I was even more amazed that Gene was still alive!

The harness and hardware are still out there in the wilds of Alaska. Don and I returned to make a search of the area, both sure that we could find it. In the future, maybe, some native, sourdough or, better yet, another jumper will find it and wonder, “What the hell?”

Don and I both received letters of recognition and a small ceremony for our part in Gene's rescue. The rescue helped jumpstart my 14 years as a smokejumper (right place, right time!), but unfortunately put an end to Gene's stellar smokejumping days (wrong place, wrong time!). I was involved in some of the legal stuff that followed for years. I ran into Gene at the 2000 Redding Smokejumper Reunion; it was great to see him. I am proud to have played a part in Gene's return to life. 🙏

If You're Here, I Must Be About Dead

by Gene Hobbs (Idaho City '61)

As with most trauma accidents, July 2, 1973, has been entirely erased from my mind. As hard as I try, I cannot remember anything from that day. When my wife, Lois, stepped off the elevator at the hospital and met with the neurosurgeon for the first time, he told her not to be surprised if I didn't know her, and that he was almost certain I would never have any recall of the accident itself.

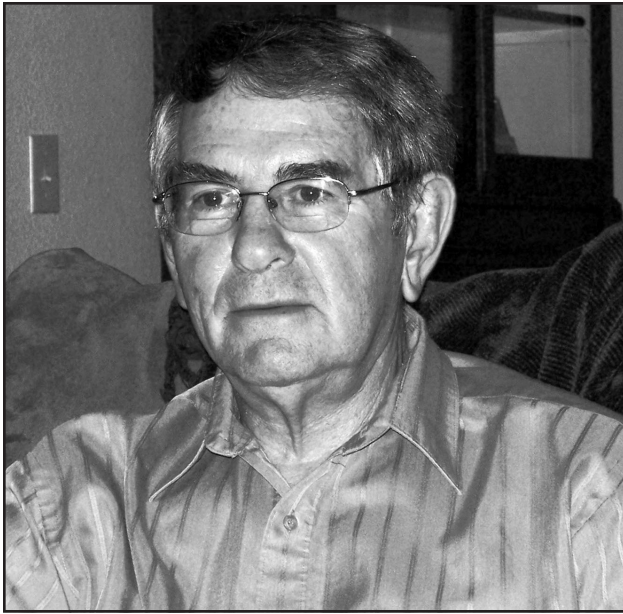
The day before the accident, I do remember jumping a “two-manner” in heavy downfall and brush a few miles from Fairbanks along the Chena River. We came upon this fire while on a patrol headed back to Fairbanks. We worked all night, using a marine pump, pumping water from the river. Foreman **Al Dunton** (FBX-67) drove out the next morning to pick us up, as we were near a road.

I knew at this time that we had back-up crews coming in from the lower 48 states, and that I would be the next rotation for spotting the next fire.

Back to the night of the accident, the first call my wife received was from **Ron Berkey** (MYC-65), who asked if she had heard from anyone about the accident. He then told her that they were flying me to a hospital in Anchorage. He explained a little about the accident and said she should be

getting official word about my condition very soon. He said he knew I was in pretty bad shape and she should get up there as soon as possible. Shortly after receiving the government call, she received a call from **Dick Hughes** (MSO -64) telling her that he had arranged for a small Forest Service plane to fly from Missoula to Orofino to pick her up and fly her to Seattle. From there she would fly commercially to Anchorage.

We soon began to learn the extent of most of my injuries. I was immediately placed on a circular electric bed because I had a broken neck (C-2 hangman's vertebrae that should kill you instantly). The doctor commented that the fact that I had been coaching high school wrestling for several years and “bridged” with the wrestlers may well have saved my life. I also had a broken right leg at the knee, damage to the sixth nerve causing double vision in my left eye, 18 stitches to the back of my head, a dislocated right shoulder, and many other lacerations and bruises. Initially, they were sure I probably had some internal injuries, as well, but, thankfully, that wasn't so. Later I did learn of other damages to my spinal column, which caused both of my hands to stay asleep and be very weak. This was caused by muscle deteriora-



Gene Hobbs (Courtesy G. Hobbs)

tion.

After arriving in Anchorage, Lois was very well taken care of for the entire time she was there. Many of the jumpers from all the bases pooled their money to help with lodging, food and a rental car. **Don Wahl** (MS0-63) even had the scary task of teaching her to drive in Anchorage traffic. Sorry, Don! As the different jumpers came to visit over the next few weeks, they always seemed to have taken up a collection and would hand Lois an envelope full of cash. We couldn't have felt more loved and taken care of and truly appreciated with all the generosity shown to both of us.

I spent a total of nine weeks at Elmendorf Air Force Hospital with my neck in traction. I lost 30 lbs., mainly muscle, and could not even sit up by myself when I was finally taken out of traction. I also had to learn to walk again using two handrails.

Definitely, one of the saddest days of my life was when the doctors told me I would never jump again. I was told I would never have more than 70% use of my right leg or the use of my hands. Up until that time, I felt I had dream occupations – teaching in the winter and smokejumping in the summer. I knew I still had a few good years left in me for smokejumping because I could still easily fulfill the physical requirements. Coaching wrestling and working out in the weight room at school kept me in fairly good shape.

When I was finally able to fly, a big BLM jet flew us back to Boise where I began rehab at the Elks Rehabilitation Center there. Because all along the doctors had been more concerned about my neck, they had never done much with my leg, so there was lots of strengthening and bending needed before I could go home on crutches. When I finally returned home to Orofino, I still had to use crutches, wore an eye patch, and sported a partially shaven head with many “orange highlights” resulting from the “halo” holes left in my skull.

After a few weeks I still wore the patch on my eye, but had now moved up to a cane instead of crutches and was

anxious to get back and coach the school wrestling team. It was excellent therapy and we had a great season.

I am thankful that at 66 I am still able to walk a lot. Even though I have shied away from a complete knee replacement and my knee has felt like I'm walking on a sprained knee ever since the accident, I get along quite well. I can no longer pack an elk out, but I do pretty well just walking and also do some hiking and hunting. **Hank Carpenter** (MSO-65) and I still hunt, and we got our lifetime Idaho moose three and four years ago.

After returning from Alaska, I had to take the rest of the school year off in order to rehabilitate. That is really when our nightmare began with the Federal Office of Workman's Compensation (OWC). We were told from the beginning that we would receive three-fourths of my GS-7 rating pay and were very shocked when our first check came and was under \$5.00 monthly. Lucky for us, we had a savings account, and I had not taken any sick leave at the high school, where I had taught for eight years. None of my prescriptions or doctors were paid for months and even years. The pharmacies, doctors and I were all worried that nothing would ever be paid. After writing numerous letters and sending many bills without any responses, we finally wrote to Idaho Senator Frank Church and his aide, Larry Larocco. They got right on the case and found that my file was lost in Washington D.C. with the word “HOLD” written in red ink. The Seattle OWC finally received my file, but we continued to have problems, with no real help offered.

The next step was to hire a lawyer. According to him, we had to sue Pioneer Parachute Co. in order to receive any compensation. Being at our wits end and not wanting to do this, we went ahead and filed the suit. After another year of litigation and more problems with the OWC, we finally settled out of court with the lawyer taking 40% off the top and, after repaying the government for the hospital, doctor and prescription drug costs, we came out with very little. It was definitely not worth all the hassles we endured. We feel there should have been some sort of compensation already set up for temporary employees.

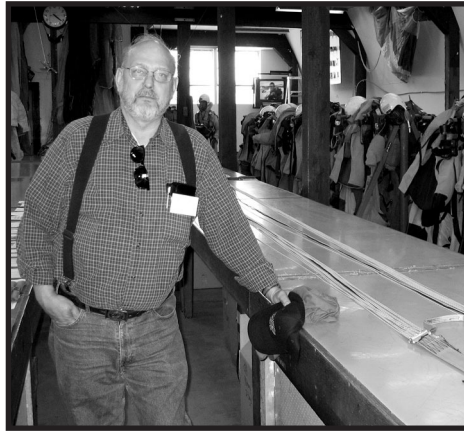
Since teaching in Idaho is not very lucrative, I decided to go back to school to get a degree in school administration. I attended the University of Idaho on the G.I. Bill, taking some night classes and attending summer school. In 1977, I received my Master's Degree and became a secondary principal in Orofino, ID. I stayed in this position for 18 years, retiring in 1996 with 30 years in education.

It was during this time in 1978 that we adopted our son, Trevor Hobbs. Upon retirement, I worked as a fireboat patrolman on Dworshak Reservoir near Orofino for the Clearwater Timber Protective Association for two summers. We now live in Lewiston, ID.

I try to make it to all the National Smokejumper reunions and stay informed on what's going on. Smokejumpers are truly a unique group of people. The comradery and friendships I made while working with various teams from all the jumper bases will always mean the world to me. I can never thank everyone enough for all the support they have shown both me and my wife through some very trying times. 🙏



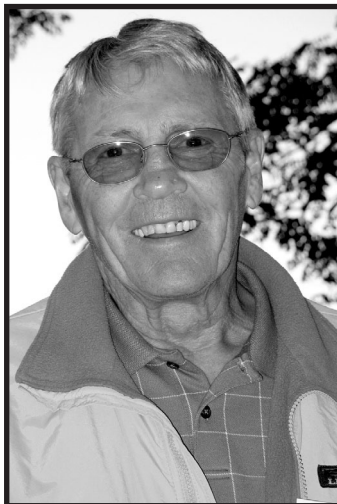
John Button (NCSB-75)



Larry Lufkin (CJ-63)



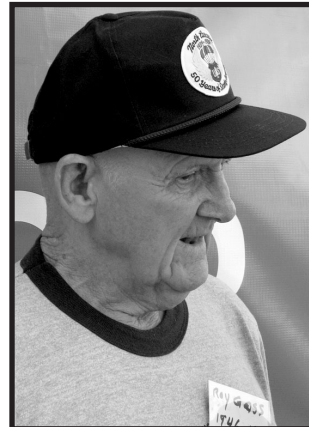
*Mike Fort (NCSB-61) &
Titus Nelson (NCSB-66)*



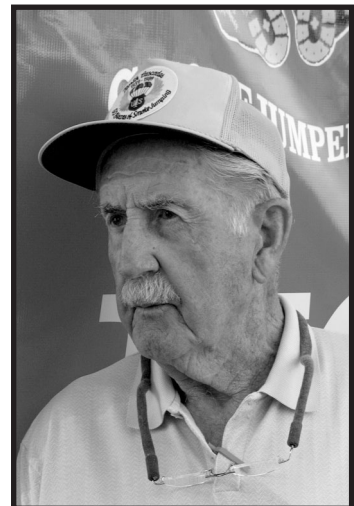
Dick Wildman (NCSB-61)



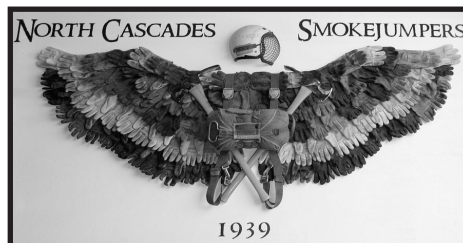
Art Higbee (NCSB-46)



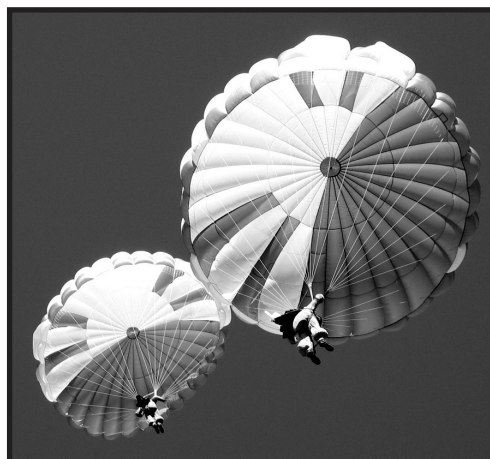
Roy Goss (NCSB-46)



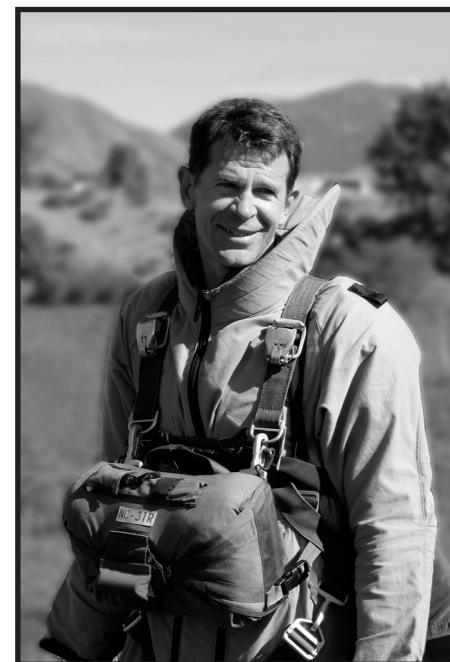
Jim Allen (NCSB-46)



Matt Desimone (NCSB-01)



Practice Jump



Daren Belsby (NCSB-86)



NCSB Reunion 2007

Photo's & Layout Design by Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64)



Casa 212 Jump Plane by Paraloft



Ed Summerfield (NCSB-47), Jim Allen (NCSB-46), Roy Goss (NCSB-46) & Art Higbee (NCSB-46)



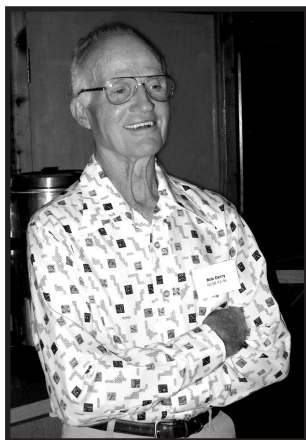
Frank Pino (NCSB-54), Rod Snider (NCSB-51), Robert Hough (NCSB-51)



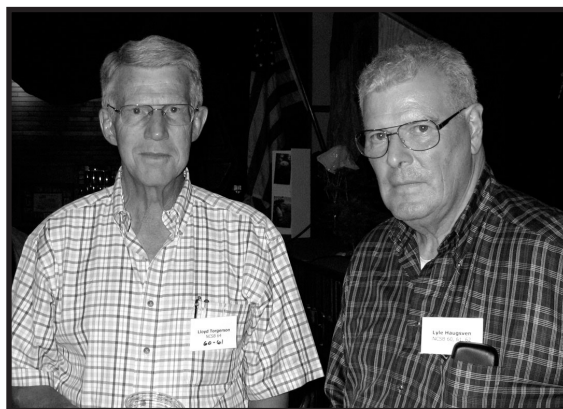
Gil Bounty (CJ-62), Charles Brown (IDC-56), Charley Moseley (CJ-62)



Bill Moody (NCSB-57) & Cecil Hicks (NCSB-62)



Bob Derry (NCSB-43)



Lloyd Torgerson (NCSB-60) & Lyle Haugsvan (NCSB-60)

Brothers

by Dick Graham (Idaho City '58)

The word "Brothers" covers
Lots of ground.
Even for "Oldtimers" or those
Not still around.

Some of the "Brothers"
I knew,
Were good men and
Part of the crew.

Miles and "Shep" Johnson,
Ken and Del Hessel.
Bob and Bill Rawlings,
To name a few.

Gene and Bennie Hobbs,
Pat & Mike Daly,
Bob & Bill Donnelley,
Were all once part of the crew.

There are lots of other "Brothers" I didn't know.
So if you're not mentioned,
Don't be offended.
No slight was intended.

Now ladies on the fireline
Is something now you see.
Chute handling and building line,
These are the things important to you and me.

So ladies, however you are known,
The important thing will be
To get the job done –
For you and for me.

Sometime blood does not "Brothers" make.
Two closer Jumpers it would be hard to find.
"Paperlegs" and Max Allen
Come to mind.

Max would play jokes on all,
But especially "Pete".
To watch them react to each other
Was really neat.

Working for the old F.S.
Was a source of pride.
It made you
Feel good inside.

The Middle Fork of the Salmon
Has always been wild and free.
My "brother" found Indian Creek Guard Station
A good place for the summer to be.

As the years went by after that time,
Some of his favorite stories to tell
Would be about the summer on the Middle Fork,
Stories told well.

There are some "Neds" every year in Region 4.
There were a lot in '64.
But there is always room on the list
For one more.

When Jumper careers are over
And you turn in your jump suits,
Everyone reaches the time
To follow other pursuits.

Tying flies or building rods,
Allan could do just fine.
He had lots of talents,
This brother of mine.

He could cast a tight loop,
I want you to know.
He could also carve some nifty turns
On the snow.

He was a good son, husband,
Father and brother.
I know I wouldn't trade him
For any other.

Now Lupus is a particularly nasty disease,
You will find.
It slowly destroys your body,
But not your mind.

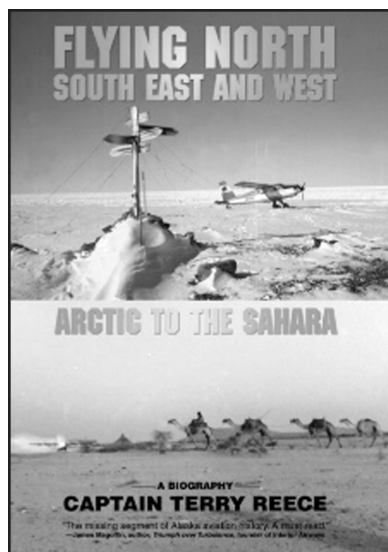
Lupus eventually got my brother.
I think you will agree
Something will get all of us -
You and me.

Now one of the things I
Hope we all do
Is look out for the "Brothers" still here and already gone-
That is my charge to you.

We will all be on a new jump list eventually,
So until that happens, "Brother,"
Keep safe and look out
For each other.

BOOK REVIEW

by Carl Gidlund (Missoula '58)



*Flying North, South, East and West:
Arctic to the Sahara by Captain Terry
Reece (Fairbanks '64)*

AS THE TITLE OF HIS BOOK indicates, Terry Reece practiced his profession in lots of places.

And he's obviously very proud of his rank. That's understandable: He earned his captain's rating in the school of hard flying.

His first flight – nearly his last – was in a vintage Luscombe in 1958. His instructor was a cousin who had a grand total of five flight hours before they took off from a pasture near their homes in the Skagit Valley, Washington. Not surprisingly, that adventure ended in a pranged plane.

It got better after that, thank goodness, and some 34 years later – most of those years spent as a “freight dog” – he climbed out of the left seat of a MarkAir 737-400 for the last time. But he still practiced his profession. For several years he trained airline pilots, then operated a floatplane service in Homer, Alaska.

Reece began his flying career as an Alaskan bush pilot, ferrying cargo and folks in pre-pipeline days and nights to remote strips, ice runways and sandbars in a series of aircraft – Beaver, Twin Beech, Cub, Bonanza—dear to us aviation fans of a certain age.

During his last years working for others, he flew schedules for MarkAir before that Alaska carrier passed away into bankruptcy. However, for most of his career he

hailed people and stuff, usually on short notice in a C-130, in and out of places like Khartoum, Ellsmere Island, Botswana, Dubai, Burma and Yemen.

Reece was also a smokejumper, a Fairbanks rookie in 1964. He jumped from that base for three seasons but condensed that portion of his adventurous life into 15 pages of his 231-page book. Since this review will be read principally by jumpers, we'll take a reasonably close look at those 15 pages and engage in a bit of nit-picking.

“Geronimo” was not screamed by smokejumpers as they exited any aircraft that I rode in, but apparently that's what they hollered in Fairbanks back in Reece's day. Well, that's what he accuses fellow rookie **Ron Lund** (FBX-64) of crying on at least one practice jump.

Neither do I recall short-sleeved orange shirts on the fire line, but then I jumped out of Fairbanks only part of one season, on the 1961 Missoula booster crew. Maybe the boys gussied up a bit three years later, but if they did wear those shirts, I bet they spent more time itching their mosquito-bit arms than they did slapping spruce branches on their fires.

He mentions men that those of us who jumped in that era and out of that base knew, but has smudged them up a bit: **Orv Looper**, the project foreman, wasn't an early '40s Missoula trainee, as Reece calls him, but a proud graduate of Cave Junction's class of '49. And the late **Phil Clarke** (Cave Junction '51) would have been happier, I'm sure, if the author had tacked an “e” onto his last name.

Reece's rookie class of 10 grows by five in two pages, and at least one Alaska spot-

ter was fast enough to slap the legs of the first two men on a three-man stick.

It may have been the custom in Alaska '64, but in my five seasons of jumping and since, I never heard of rookies packing their own chutes for practice jumps.

A typo converts **Larry Craven's** (FBX-64) name to “Carvens.” And Reece's account of the death by strangulation of **Arden Davis**, another '64 Fairbanks rookie, on a 1966 refresher jump is a trifle different than what I've heard of the accident.

According to **Cecil Hicks** (NCSB-62), another jumper who was there, Davis's boots were just a couple of feet off the ground, not 10 feet as Reece writes. Further, most accounts say that Davis had dropped his reserve, and therefore his parachute knife, to the ground before releasing his Capewells, thus obviating any possibility of his cutting the load line that caught around his throat and killed him.

But those are trifling details that shouldn't detract from the book unless the reader is a student of smokejumper history.

Captain Reece has a wry and self-effacing sense of humor, and his book is a charming autobiography. It will be of principal interest to bush pilots or those who aspire to adventurous aviating rather than the conventional (and far more lucrative) world of scheduled airlines.

Even if you're not a pilot but you enjoy reading about seat-of-the-pants flying in lots of out-of-the way places, you'll like it too.

“Flying North, South, East and West” is available through the NSA store at www.smokejumpers.com 🐼

You Need to Add This Book To Your Collection



NSA Historian **Larry Longley** (NCSB-72) has produced an excellent book, “Spittin' In The Wind.” This 256-page work was made for the NCSB Reunion held in September 2007. There are many photos to complement the 50+ stories submitted by numerous jumpers. If you are a reader of smokejumper literature or just someone looking for a good book, you need to add this to your collection. The cost is \$21.50 which includes shipping. Contact: **Larry Longley**, 16430 Marine Dr., Stanwood, WA 98292, 360-654-1720, LDLongley@Cyben.com 🐼



Items from the Fire Pack



by Bill Fogarty (Missoula '57)

Proof Enough

Three months after I was 18 years of age, I was on my way to Denison, Iowa for Civilian Public Service, spending eight months there. That fall, while working on a soil conservation project, a man named **Harvey Weirich** (MYC-44) came back to Denison from the smokejumping unit. He was my foreman and was very graphic in describing the interesting experiences that he had in the smokejumpers; he planned to return there the following year. This activity was something that was very interesting to me since I had a great interest in flying. I thought that if I could get into the smokejumpers, there would be enough danger involved that people might realize I was serious about my stand against war and was not just a "yellow belly."

James Brunk (Missoula '45)

The First Season

During my first season, I remember working variously on wood procurement, haying, and finally being assigned to the saw shop where I filed crosscuts and sharpened sickle bars for the mowing machines. Someone loaned me a radio so I could listen to soap operas and news all day. There was only one station available then. I jumped 11 times that year: seven training, one refresher, and three fires. After the fire season, I transferred back to the Powellville, Maryland U.S. Soil Conservation Service drainage project, thinking to reapply next spring.

Benjamin Case (Missoula '44)

Frank Derry's Last Jump

I was in a group that trained at Seeley Lake. Living at the old scout camp meant boat trips to and from

the Ranger Station. **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) was the head man, great! **Jim Waite** (MSO-40) was the foreman for those who stayed at Seeley Lake. While in training we watched **Frank Derry** (NCSB-40) make his last jump. He did not land on the field.

Bryn Hammarstrom
(Missoula '43)

Interesting Discussions

Until fire season, I worked awhile at the Lincoln Ranger Station cutting fallen trees and repairing telephone lines to fire lookouts. The first Saturday in July, we reported to Missoula, and the next afternoon, I made my first jump on a fire. During July and August, I made seven fire jumps. It was one of the most enjoyable summers of my life. After fire season, I went with a group of fellows to Idaho to help build a 200 foot swinging bridge across the Lochsa River. Everything was packed in by mule train. We lived four men to a tent. Our tent had a Quaker, a Catholic, an Agnostic and a Menno-nite. That made for interesting discussions in the evenings after work.

Willard Handrich (Missoula '45)

Self Respect

Smokejumpers developed close relationships, many of which have become stronger through the years. Jumping on fires gave us status; besides, I suppose we all felt more secure from criticism and prejudice. It would be difficult to judge a smokejumper cowardly or yellow, and, just maybe, some of us had something to prove to ourselves.

H. Lee Hebel (Missoula '44)

Another Time

Parachute jumping was a mountain top experience, especially in the sense that I frequently landed

on mountain tops or high places where lightning strikes started the majority of forest fires. It was a rewarding experience, although it dates to an earlier period in history when fires were extinguished as soon as possible, to silk parachutes, moccasin-tip gloves, switchblade knives, packing paddles and pulaskis. Equally important was the support of hard working friends, of several different religious faiths, who were determined to do an effective job. Looking for Japanese balloon bombs and making special demonstration jumps to show how to get out of a disabled airplane with a rip-cord chute were interesting changes from cruising timber in the winters. Successfully putting out a single snag fire, before it became a forest fire, was ultimately rewarding, purposeful and economical. The orderly process of packing parachutes, testing and jumping them, and dropping drift chutes and spotting the jumpers in the most advantageous place, and then joining them became a process in which small variations provided enlargements of details, sometimes exciting, that were unique to each of my 34 jumps. On top of all this, no one ever spoke a harsh word to me or denied a request for a cup of coffee during the busy seasons when I was a rigger, packer, jumper and spotter in Oregon, Washington and Montana.

William Laughlin (Cave Junction '43)

More Hang Time

In 1945, we were brought back to Nine Mile for renewed conditioning and three refresher jumps. I remember that on one of them, we persuaded the pilot to take us up to three or four thousand feet, which was higher than the usual 2000 foot jumping altitude. (On fires, where we had to hit a certain spot or hang

up in trees, we often jumped from 1500 feet or less.) That gave us a minute of two longer to ride the chute to the ground. Between seasons, a change had been made in the slotted Irvin parachutes we used to give better control of our direction. In 1944 a few jumpers still used the Eagle (a very pretty chute with "porch and ears," as we called it), but these silk chutes vanished before the training period of 1945.

Gregg Phifer (Missoula '44)

Excellent Training

I must say that the training we received was excellent. Especially from **Earl Cooley** (MSO-40) and **Frank Derry** (NCSB-40), the West Coast Representative for the Eagle Parachute Company. The training was concise, thorough and no question asked was too small or ridiculous to receive an answer. Throughout the entire time there was a strong emphasis placed on safety. This is evident in the fact of very few injuries, considering the number of jumps made on forest fires plus the training jumps. In addition, the excellent training accounts for the fact that not only were we not afraid to jump, but many of us wanted to be the first to make a practice jump and the first to jump on a fire. The Forest Service personnel of the smokejumping unit deserve a lot of credit for taking a group of inexperienced and untrained young men from all walks of life and making them into effective smokejumpers. I certainly appreciated their training and concern for safety.

Clarence Quay (Missoula '43)

Why?

When the opportunity was given to apply for smokejumping, it sounded exciting and I did. The Mennonite Central Committee wanted a letter from my family giving consent for such a "dangerous occupation." My uncle wrote that he could not figure out why I wanted to "give my life for a dumb tree," but consent was given.

Walter Reimer (Missoula '44)

War Prisoners

In the two years, 1944 and 1945, I made 21 jumps and had some terrific experiences, both on and off the fire fighting season. Some of us really got to know each other under various circumstances. Some even brought tears to our eyes like the Christmas Eve that Murray Baden led us in singing "Adeste Fideles" to a group of Italian war prisoners in their camp not far from ours at the Savanac Nursery.

Charles Schumacher (Missoula '44)

The Jump Tower

In '58 in McCall, all they had at that time was the old wooden jump tower, which was about 30 feet high. There was a log boom that went across the top of the tower with a pulley on the end of it. The upper deck was mocked-up like a doorway of an aircraft, and when they tapped your leg, you jumped off. Below you there was a little kind of pen four feet off the ground with a piece of tarp roped in there in case the rope broke, I guess. Of course, it never happened, but it added a little bit of a safety factor. You'd jump off that thing and hit the end of that rope. On the other end of the rope, they had a big old spring down at the base of the tower on the backside where the rope was attached. The rope went from there to a pulley along the boom, and then to the pulley out front, and then just straight down where you jumped off. That big old spring was off something big, maybe a railroad boxcar, cause it didn't give any. When you hit the end of that rope, it just ... it just made you shorter. I mean it; if you didn't do it right, you'd see stars every time.

Ken Hessel (McCall '58)

What Was Your First Jump Like?

The motors roared as we raced down the runway and into the air. The wind beat against the open door. Hot and cold chills began to play tag through my system. My mouth was dry. I gave a quick glance

out and down. I spotted an object, looked again, only to see the stretcher bearers running onto the field. "What happened?" "Will it happen to me?" "Put it out of your mind. You've got to do it." I turned my attention to the line of grim faces and the spotter. There's the signaling, we're coming in, and now? "Okay fellows, be seeing you around a steak dinner," grinned the spotter. I tried to laugh, but it was a slow dry cackle. My mind raced on. "Will I be able to find the field?" "Will I hit the step?" Unconsciously I found myself fingering the emergency parachute. Again I wondered, "Will I remember to use it; what will I do if the parachute catches on the plane's tail?" Visions of myself dangling on the tail stole into my mind only to be stopped short, for the spotter had raised his hand. I held my breath. That slow sickness ran through my system, ending like lead in my stomach. Down came the hand! Simultaneously I swallowed, summoned up all my energy, and put myself through the plane's door.

Maynard Shetler (Missoula '44)

Train Rides

In May 1944, **Oliver Petty** (MSO-43) and I left CPS Camp 76 and had a very enjoyable train ride from Los Angeles to Butte, Montana, where we got on the Milwaukee R.R. train to go to Missoula. We were taken to CPS Camp 103 near the Nine Mile Remount Depot. I enjoyed the lovely scenery and most of the training to be a jumper. **Karl Schmidt** (MSO-44), one of the squad leaders, gave me special coaching, and I finally was allowed my first jump after most of the men had been jumping awhile. The first airplane ride of my life was also my first parachute jump. I never landed in an airplane until my 10th flight. That one was to have been a fire jump, but we got rained out. The Ford Trimotor landed at Sandpoint, Idaho. After two days of standby, we had a nice train ride back to Missoula.

Edwin Vail (Missoula '44) 🐼

Rescue Dawn - A Big Disappointment

by Denny Breslin (North Cascades '69)

As a former Navy pilot, I read Jerry DeBruin's critique of *Rescue Dawn* with interest because of the reputation Dieter Dengler had among Navy WestPac aircrews in the Vietnam War. Going through SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape) school in Warner Springs, California (near San Diego) prior to going overseas to my first squadron in 1973, we were given Dengler's evasive accomplishments at SERE school as "goals" in our evasion and escape training. He had avoided his captors on the evasion course and escaped the prison camp while guards were looking the other way. I hadn't heard of Dengler before that, but I figured if he could avoid getting caught, then so could I. If he could escape from the mock-POW camp, then perhaps I could, as well. It gave me something to shoot for.

The first part was easy; I hunkered down in my camouflage and was never caught. I made it to the end of the three-mile course unscathed, though all my brethren had been caught and "tortured." However, I wasn't able to escape from the POW camp because I was never allowed the opportunities that Dieter had.

Fast-forward to the return of POW's in 1973 and the end of the war in 1975. Three ex-POW's were in my squadron in Pensacola, Florida. My utmost respect for Ross Terry, Gene Sierras and John Heilig was born of the actions and attitudes of these truly great, generous and genuine men who had endured seven years of literally death-defying brutality.

Then came the POW books, and among them, *Escape from Laos*. It was impressive and filled-in the blanks about Dengler's exploits I'd heard about in SERE school. Later, as an American Airlines pilot, I was flying from Chicago to San Francisco one night, and a TWA flight was just in front of us. Dengler was a TWA pilot at the time. I asked the pilots if they knew Dengler and was surprised by the seemingly sarcastic response framed by the words, "...don't believe everything you read." I was puzzled because I'd read the accounts of every POW who wrote a book, and all seemed like heroes to me.

So last night my son brought the video over, and we watched Werner Herzog's follow-up to *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*. Understanding that a certain amount of literary license is granted to film writers/producers, one can give some leeway in the telling of the story. But after reading the critical comments from Gene DeBruin's family and the account from Phisit, it is clear that Mr. Herzog went beyond the bounds of "literary license" into what amounts to mean fiction.

It is sad that Americans will not see the truth about Gene DeBruin and those prisoners in Laos. Herzog had every



Denny Breslin (NSA file)

opportunity to make them all the courageous heroes they were. Jerry DeBruin gave it the proper perspective with the notion that Gene, Duane, YC and others are no less heroes because they didn't make it out. 🙏



Historic photo: 1976 Bake Oven Fire Shasta-Trinity N.F. L-R Sitting: Unknown, Rod McIver (MSO-64), Mike Baird (RAC-75). L-R Standing: Dale Longanecker (RAC-74), Pat Nooney (MSO-73), Ron Rucker (RAC-76), Joel Forsberg (RAC-76), Doug Houston (RAC-73), and Dallas Berringer (RAC-75)

Rendezvous

by T.J. Thompson (Missoula '55)

The annual Smokejumper Mountain Man Rendezvous was held September 10, 2007, at Lolo Hot Springs, Montana. Attendees are listed with the photo.

Bob Weaver was the "honored guest." He will soon be 90 years old and is active and in great shape. Bob started the first Survival Training course for the Army Air Corps in 1943 and the first Para-Rescue Team in 1947. We all went through this type of training in the 50/60s before deploying overseas.

It was a great honor to have Bob share some of his experiences with us. Thanks to you, Bob, from all of us old 'Smokies." Bob's son, Bob Jr., jumped out of Missoula from 1969-71.

We had a great reunion, as usual, ending with breakfast at the "Ox." The next Rendezvous will be held at the Hot Springs in September 2008.

The eight of us have spent close to fifty years together. What a great team to draw to! 🍷



L-R: Ken Hessel (MYC-58), Gary Hannon (MSO-60), Bob Weaver (honored guest), standing Randolph "Toby" Scott (MYC-57), seated Shep Johnson (MYC-56), Lyle Brown (MSO-54), Bob Nicol (MSO-52), T.J. Thompson (MSO-55). (Courtesy T.J. Thompson)



All Kickers & Smokejumpers are Invited to attend the Air America Assoc. Reunion in Portland June 5-8, 2008. Reunion Information & Registration online <http://www.air-america.org/>

Reunion/Reunion.shtml or Call Johnny Kirkley (CJ-64) 808.259-5126. Hotel Reservation and Reunion Registration cut off date will be May 3rd. 1-800-EMBASSY or 1-503-644-4000. 🍷

Smokejumper Museum Backers Looking For Green Light

by Jeff Duewel

Reprinted with the permission of the author and the Grants Pass "Daily Courier" from the Wednesday, August 8, 2007 edition.

CAVE JUNCTION—Bob Bleadon's vision of the Illinois Valley Airport includes pilots dropping by to see the proposed smokejumper museum, grabbing a quick bite at the restaurant, and maybe spending a few hours exploring the Illinois Valley.

"It's called a \$100 hamburger by pilots," said Bleadon, who has his own airport for ultralights in Selma, and served on the IV Airport Board.

As of now, the smokejumper museum hasn't gotten off the ground, the restaurant has been closed for a couple of years, and visions of the airport seem to be at odds.

Two or three planes a day land at the airport, which has a 16-lot industrial park with no tenants. There is also no fuel on site. Owned by Josephine County, the 176-acre airport was a base for smokejumpers from 1943 to 1981, and has a 5,200-foot runway. Bleadon and smokejumper museum advocates say they've been stymied by county commissioners and Airport Manager Alex Grossi.

"Alex thinks those buildings are a problem," said **Roger Brandt** (Associate), who's spent hundreds of hours trying to turn the five buildings of the former smokejumper base into a museum. The buildings are already on the National Register of Historic Places, but falling apart.

"It's a one-of-a kind tourist attraction, Brandt added. "There's nothing like it for a thousand miles."

Grossi and commissioners plan to meet soon to discuss the future of the airport. The key issue is whether the airport will follow a 1992 master plan calling for instrument-approach guidelines, or go with visual approach. Instrument approaches use higher-tech lighting and radio signals to guide in larger planes, medical and corporate flights, which could stimulate economic growth, Grossi said.

But it would also require 250-foot buffers from the center of the runway, which would eliminate Smokejumper Way, the southerly access to the former base.

Grossi has already cut down trees and eliminated parking to accommodate the upgrade, which smokejumper museum advocates say will make it more difficult to bring in recreational pilots.

"The folks who want it to be a pure recreational airport are going to have to recognize their wants and needs aren't the only ones," said Jim Raffenberg, county Board of Commissioners chairman. "We'll work with them to make sure the impacts they are afraid of are minimized."

Grossi doesn't believe he's been an impediment.

"I've always thought the smokejumper museum was a good idea. We just have to be careful it doesn't interfere with airport activity," Grossi said. "We're going to be talking about the direction the airport should be taking that doesn't jeopardize our good reputation with the FAA."

Smokejumper museum backers were also rankled that the seven-member Airport Board was disbanded last month, because it gave them a larger voice.

Chief Operating Officer, Marie Hill, said the county hopes to have a lease agreement for the smokejumper museum done by Sept. 1, detailing rent, planned improvements and maintenance issues. Brandt said he's lining up grants, and volunteers are ready to go.

"I don't think there's a conflicting vision," Hill said. "This is something we wanted to have done a couple of months ago, but with layoffs and other assigned responsibilities, working on the details hasn't been that easy."

Ron Lindley of Brookings said he's been trying to build a hangar and fueling station for over a year, but the county hasn't come up with a lease agreement.

In the meantime, Jack McCornack's company, Kinetic Aerospace, has leased the former parachute loft at the old base for the past few years. McCornack builds flying machines, one of which was used in the James Bond film, "Die Another Day," starring Pierce Brosnan and Halle Berry.

McCornack pulls weeds and does other groundskeeping.

"I'm keeping the county from bulldozing this place," he said.

Brandt hopes to gradually put in a self-guided walking tour with interpretive signs.

"We have a vision of getting visitors here with a great story which casts a positive light on Josephine County," Brandt said.

"The museum isn't going to save the Illinois Valley economy, but it's going to fill its part of the niche," said **Wes Brown** (CJ-66), former smokejumper and Airport Board member.

"Everybody agrees we need to make the airport better, but it's not happening," said **Gary Buck** (CJ-66), another former smokejumper working with Brandt on the museum project.

And there's Sharon Westcott, an ultralight instructor who works out of the airport. "There's a spirit of the Gobi out here from the smokejumpers," she said. "And it's not going to go away." 🦋

The Smokejumper Nine

by Mark Walmsley

They were flying from Redmond,
Northwest across the high Cascades,
To fight fire with hand tools,
The old-fashioned way.

A lightning strike in big timber,
Waits for them in the Olympic Mountains ahead,
"It's twenty miles from the nearest road,"
The dispatcher said.

Just the kind of thing,
For a few hard men,
And one woman with grit,
Who was accompanying them.

Circling the ridge for an open landing spot,
Streamers fall,
As the smoke rises through the tall treetops.

Now each waits for his turn at the open door,
Then steps out and drops toward the green forest floor.

Aiming for what they thought was a meadow clear,
Parachutes billow,
Along with a small pucker of fear.

Eight land in slide alder,
Not a meadow at all,
As they gather their gear and their thoughts,
The ninth can't be found!

Taking pulaskis and shovels,
Six start digging line,
As two head for a blue speck in a fir crown,
With a few silent prayers for smokejumper nine.

As they climb towards him,
They follow his voice,
Sounds like a giant Doug-fir landing,
Was not his first choice.

* Dedicated to the Redmond smokejumpers. With some thoughts from the Oh Brother Fire of September 1999 and that crew of Gary Atteberry (RAC-97), Eric Bush (RAC-99), Mark Christensen (RAC-88), Mark Corbet (LDG-74), Matt Gray (RAC-95), Earl Palmer (RAC-97), Kevin Pellman (RAC-99), Charlie Roos (RAC-97), Ron Rucker (RAC-76), Dirk Stevens (RAC-91) and Tiffan Thoele (RAC-95).

Mark Walmsley worked on the Olympic National Forest for 26 years in silviculture, as a wilderness ranger and as a firefighter. Mark's father Capt. Cyril E. Walmsley was a forest service lookout-fireman in 1941-42. He then served as C-47 pilot in England during WWII. Mark can be contacted at: (360) 877-5103.

Breathing much harder,
They reach the base of the fir,
When from forty feet above,
They clearly hear a few, self-cursing words.

Dangling from the end of his trusty letdown rope,
Their friend had thoughts he might soon become fodder,
For a new jumper joke.

As the two looked up into the branches,
He looked down and said, "Hey, I'm fine,"
For there hanging - and slowly rotating clockwise,
Was smokejumper nine!

Now the two went into action,
And rescued their friend,
Knowing they'd have a new story,
To tell to the end.

Well, six days later,
With the fire lined and no smoke or heat to be found,
They hiked out over all twenty miles,
Of that rough, un-trailed ground.

Now, some might question this story,
Because I wasn't there,
But, the nine who were still tell it,
So, I just don't care.

You see this was all told to me,
By the one woman with grit,
She said, "I was there,
And this is no bullshit!"



L-R: Mark Walmsley and Engine Foreman Ken VanBuskirk
(Courtesy M. Walmsley)

Life After Smokejumping

by Joe Rumble (Missoula '49) and Susan Rumble

For the rest of his life, a smokejumper will be looking for the job or recreation that duplicates the thrill, camaraderie and energy output of smokejumping and wildfire fighting. For me, long-distance hiking on the Appalachian Trail (A.T.) answered some of those desires. I found that hiking and smokejumping shared many of the same challenges: hard work, outdoor activity, sensible decision making, goal setting and great satisfaction in attaining those goals.

The A.T. starts at Springer Mountain, Georgia, and follows the mountain ridges to Mt. Katahdin in Maine—2,160 scenic miles. The highest point is Clingman's Dome, North Carolina, at 6,600 ft., and the lowest point is Harriman State Park, New York, at 134 ft. The net changes in elevation just in North Carolina and Tennessee equal five Mount Everest climbs, or 147,000 ft.!

I had done a lot of hiking in my life, and hiking the A.T. had been a goal ever since I lived in North Carolina in the 80s. On a trip back east in 1992, I took my wife on a four-day mini-hike from Springer Mountain to make sure that trekking would be her cup of tea. It was, so the next year we tackled the logistics in earnest. We did the Trail in four sections. In 1993 we began with 1,060 miles in 100 days, and then took three more hikes to finish in 2003.

It would take a book to record all the details, but this article will attempt to hit some of the high points (pun intended) and to go deeper than a mere hiker's-guide description.

How Much To Take?

We were intentionally and proudly low budget on our AT hikes. My years of working trails for the USFS and NPS taught me how to pick out the right clothing and equipment. Expense was not and still isn't a guarantee of good performance. Some of our best stuff was purchased at Wal-Mart and Goodwill. At many shelters you will find discarded Gore-Tex jackets and other fancy things that just didn't pan out for someone. Hostels always maintain a "hiker box" where trekkers can leave behind food and clothing that aren't being used, in the hope that others can.

Weight is everything when you're carrying it on your back. After just five days on the Trail, we sent back 11 pounds of unused stuff. And at the next town, we sent 3 pounds more, paring us down to a pack weight of 43 pounds for Joe and 35 for Susan. It is painful to carry anything you don't have to. You quickly catch on to what's essential, and then very carefully choose which luxuries, if any, you're willing to add to your load. Seasoned hikers even cut off most of their toothbrush handle, just to save a few ounces.

You soon learn what clothing and equipment is neces-

sary, and you can easily spot someone who doesn't belong on the trail. People with 5-pound radios, tight blue jeans, flip-flops or stocking caps in July in Virginia are not long-distance hikers; no matter what story they try to tell. And that can cut both ways—we were told in Virginia that we looked too clean to be through-hikers, or this comment in Maine: "You're too nice to be hikers, and you're too well-dressed!" Guess we didn't fit in as well as we thought.

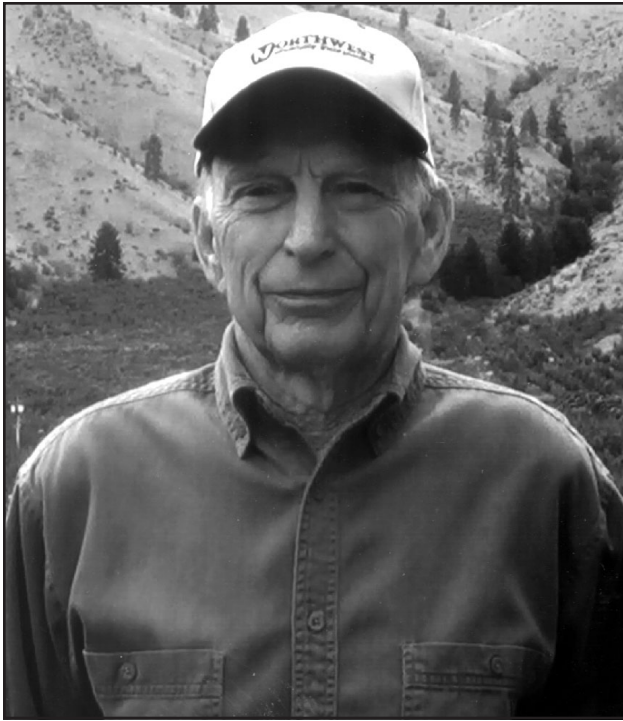
We ran into a few ultra-lite hikers and heard a lot of talk about that system. To hike ultra-lite is to wager that there will be absolutely no weather surprises or glitches in your supply strategies. When things go badly, the ultra-lites are immediately at the mercy of the rest of us who are willing to carry more weight and go a little slower in order to insure safety. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we heard about a hiker named Badger who carried all sorts of extra stuff—tarps, duct tape, machete, cooking gear. The next day we were honored to meet him and were surprised to see that he was only 5'8" and slight, but very tough—a Vietnam veteran from Wisconsin.

We ran into people who felt they could do without all sorts of things. There was Big Foot, who, when we met him, believed that he didn't need to carry water. He wanted to be like the forest animals that only drink when they come to a stream; never mind that the four-legged don't force themselves to hike 20 miles a day on the AT. The next time we saw him, two weeks later, he was carrying lots of water! Another fellow, Space Monkey, chose not to carry any sort of water purifier. We did not find out how he fared. There was a very frugal young fellow who carefully folded several thicknesses of aluminum foil into a bowl shape to cook his food over our campfire—he carried no pot or stove. And another person felt that maps were expendable.

Just About Everything Tastes Good On The Trail

We spent months drying fruits, vegetables, and cooked beans and lentils in preparation for our hikes. We'd measure and package it, and address the boxes to "General Delivery—Hold for northbound hiker Joe Rumble" at our anticipated town stops. (The local postmasters were usually wonderfully accommodating.) Then these boxes would be shipped to Joe's son in North Carolina, who had agreed to mail them at the appointed times. That way, all we had to buy in stores was rice, oatmeal, canned chicken or tuna, plus any extras that caught our fancy, like oranges and grapefruit or M&Ms. (We never tried the trendy-spendy freeze-dried stuff.)

We made it a priority to have at least two hot meals a day, and three if we could find a suitable spot at lunchtime.



Joe Rumble (Courtesy J. Rumble)

Stopping to eat, we couldn't bag as many miles in a day as the pop tart and candy bar eaters, but we're certain it vastly improved our outlook. Hiking the AT requires not only physical but mental toughness to stick to the task when weather, terrain, discomfort and routine threaten to derail your effort. By eating well, we avoided the "Virginia Blues," the disenchantment that afflicts many through-hikers midway through their journey. We looked forward to each meal—how excited could you get about your 357th serving of Ramen?

The Ups And Downs Of The Trail

Volunteers from local mountain clubs maintain the Appalachian Trail, except in the two National Parks it crosses. There is no standardization whatsoever in the trail terrain or quality. A few clubs are very well financed and can bring in trail architects to craft the very best routes. But most groups have merely maintained the ancient pioneer, Indian, or game trails, or scramblings of their own choosing—often straight up and straight down! Critiquing the Trail's setting and quality is sort of an intramural sport among hikers. In Maine, they take great pride in making hikers ford streams and maneuver through steep rocks and roots. New Hampshire's Appalachian Mountain Club self-consciously reserves its best parking spaces for hyper-environmental earth muffin cars, yet allows horrendous erosion on its section of the Trail. Erosion has destroyed any semblance of a realistic ascent/descent of some ridges and mountains—it's like hiking in a very steep streambed. Pack animals are prohibited on the Trail, but who would want to take them there?

New Hampshire (except for the intelligently-maintained section belonging to the Dartmouth Outing Club) would

definitely get the prize for worst trail. Second would be the very northern section of Pennsylvania, where for two days you cannot put your foot down squarely because you're walking on knife-like, ankle-busting rocks from the sharp-edged outcrop of a long, over-thrust rock formation. Honorable Mention would go to parts of Connecticut and New Jersey for taking you out of your way just so you *could* climb over their rocks. Portions of the southern Trail have bad spots, such as Dragon's Tooth in Virginia, the Stecoahs, and the descent to the Nantahala in North Carolina, but they are comparatively short and only a harbinger of things to come farther north.

But it's not all terrible, by any means. The very best trail we experienced was in Smokey Mountains National Park—wide and intelligently graded, like the western USFS trails. Vermont was wonderfully planned and maintained by the Green Mountain Club. Georgia has done a lot of trail relocation, and Virginia was mostly easy to hike. On the best days you get miles of ridge top trail or old logging road to walk on. Even the worst states have their reprieves. We were grateful for several totally horizontal miles along the Housatonic River in Connecticut. And for all its ruggedness, Maine has nearly as much flat trail as mountainous. There's Nothing Like The A.T. Trail Culture

There are shelters every 10 or so miles on the Appalachian Trail. And there is a road crossing and nearby town usually every 60 miles or so. You get into quite a rhythm of being out in the woods for 5-6 days, followed by a day in civilization, and back out to nature and freedom again. And you can never decide which you need the most. The shelters all have a battered spiral notebook and stub of pencil, carefully stored in some sort of plastic bag for all to record their day's adventures. This informal communication tool is the heart of the unique A.T. trail culture. Everyone has a trail name (Tall Drink of Water, Recycled Teenagers, the Noodleheads, Rocky Top, Exodus, to name just a few), and you get to know people by their journal entries, even though you've never met them. And you are able to leave a literary footprint for others to know you as well.

You develop a strong, self-reliant lifestyle of living out of your pack—shifting it back and forth on your shoulders all day; the heavenly pleasure of taking the darn thing off at 5:00; then leisurely comparing equipment and the day's experiences with your shelter-mates. You take everything out of your pack and set out your sleeping bag (if you get to the shelter early enough, you can claim one of the corners!); you make a wonderfully satisfying meal. If the shelter has a fire pit, it becomes the evening's entertainment; otherwise you turn in for sleep at sunset, awake at sunrise, and neatly put everything back in the pack after breakfast. You pause to write a journal entry before setting out for another day of progress. This is known as being "on the Trail." It is a serious decision to get "off the Trail." Stepping off a train, or getting out of a car is merely a change of location. Getting off the Trail is leaving a part of you behind!

A Walk Through America

What you remember most about the A.T. are the people.

Your fellow hikers fill most of your days, and they are a varied lot. To name a few, we met a nuclear energy consultant, a downsized bank executive, another smokejumper from Montana, a firefighter couple from Florida, a civil engineer, a pediatrician, a steelworker, college professors, fathers and sons and numerous military types, one doing a memorial hike for a fallen comrade.

The real flavor of the places we visited was seen in the local folks and the bits of their lives they revealed to us. First, the tourists at Clingman's Dome wanted to take our picture as if we were part of the wildlife! There was a lady who owned a small roadside cigarette and snack store in North Carolina, who reacting to slightly disparaging remarks of some other customers about smoking, told us she had put her kids through school on tobacco money. We like to tell the story of the couple that gave us a ride to Franklin, North Carolina, and said, "We weren't going to pick you up, but we saw you was a lady!" There were two southern gals coming out of church who said, "Take me along with you—I just love God's creation!" We remember the ranger who gave us a ride to Cherokee, North Carolina, and dropped us off at the buffet restaurant. We rode back up to the mountains the next day with a recently-retired life Marine. We chatted with an entomologist in Virginia, tending gypsy moth traps. There was the waitress in Hampton, Tennessee, who shyly brought us a complementary dessert, just because we were hikers. Similarly, the conductor on the train from Harper's Ferry to D.C. saw fit to let us ride for free. A jazz musician in New York took us in when we couldn't find a motel in Peekskill. We talked to people in Millinocket, Maine, with the story of how the timber industry is faltering there—that tourism might be the only thing left.

Then there was the history. In Pennsylvania we passed a marker for the nearby site of Fort Dietrich-Snyder in the French and Indian War. In Tennessee the Trail intersected the trace that the mountaineers used to join the Battle at King's Mountain in the Revolutionary War. There were several Civil War landmarks. Near Erwin, Tennessee, we walked by the graves of the Shelton brothers, shot as they returned from a visit home. On South Mountain in Maryland, we kept seeing perfectly flat, 25'x25' clearings most likely made for gun emplacements. In the same state, we walked by the original Washington's Monument and the Civil War Correspondents Memorial. In Maine we intersected the route used by Benedict Arnold and his men in their ill-fated invasion of Canada in 1775. There were old collier pits in Virginia, and the central section of Pennsylvania went through the old mining region. In a now-remote area, we passed a sign for Rausch Gap, a mining town that once counted 1,000 inhabitants. On much of the Trail, miles of stone fences still bear witness to the strong backs and stronger determination of the pioneers.

Conclusion

The more time that goes by since our great A.T. adventure, the more we realize what a treasure that experience was. We love to reminisce about the night the wind was so strong on Bly Gap, how wrong the mileage was to Moreland

Shelter, the tame wild horses on Mt. Rogers begging for treats, the electrical storms in Tennessee and Virginia and how quickly we put up our tent to take shelter, what a wonderful night's sleep we got on the hard linoleum floor at the Catholic Church in Cheshire, or the time we barely made it to Thomas Knob Shelter before the hail started blowing horizontally. These memories take their place next to my earlier smokejumping experiences, never to be duplicated, but never to be forgotten. 🍷



Dale Longanecker's 813th jump made at the NCSB Reunion in September 2007. Since then Dale has totaled 818 jumps, of which 464 are fire jumps. (Courtesy Johnny Kirkley)

Death Of A Smokejumper

by Jeff Duewel

The following article by Jeff Duewel ran in the Grants Pass Daily Courier May 26, 2007, and is reprinted with permission.

Tommy Smith (CJ-61) had a date with his girlfriend planned for the evening of Friday, May 5, 1967, so he and fellow smokejumpers **Rey Zander** (NCSB-55) and **Ron McMinimy** (RDD-65) hurried to the rugged banks of the Illinois River after roughing out a helicopter landing area near Nome Peak. It was 11 in the morning.

They still had to ferry their gear across in a rubber raft, walk up the opposite side to the Illinois River Trail and pack out a few miles to a dirt road.

Smith, 6-foot-1 and skinny as a rail, tied 150 feet of 1-inch thick nylon rope around his waist, jumped in and swam across. After that, everything went wrong.

Forty years (and 10 days) later, Floy Ann Smith flipped through photos of Tommy, the oldest of four children, in an Army yearbook from Fort Ord, Calif. Inside was a letter dated April 3, 1964, commending her son for being the outstanding trainee in his company.

Tommy loved his Chevrolet El Camino and his Triumph motorcycle. He bowled for the Byrd's Market team.

Floy has a casserole he gave her for Christmas 1966. She scribbles notes to herself on an old tablet of work logs of her son's from 40 years ago.

There are a few shots of Sandy Weeks, his girlfriend, who he met in Ashland while going to Southern Oregon College and working at Safeway. Tommy's family moved to Grants Pass from Texas in 1954, and he graduated from Grants Pass High School in 1958.

"He was going to bring her home to meet me on Mother's Day," 88-year-old Floy Smith said, sitting in her neat retirement home in Grants Pass. "He was a very good son. I shed all the tears I ever had the first year or two after he died."

Terry Mewhinney (CJ-64), Smith's best friend and roommate in Cave Junction, was directly across the river on York Butte with **John Robison** (CJ-65), also clearing a landing spot for a helicopter.

"I heard the call on the radio, 'We think we lost a jumper,'" said Mewhinney, now retired and living in Agness.

Down in the canyon, Tommy Smith had already drowned. Smith either was pulled back into the water by the force of the current on the rope, slipped and fell, or jumped in to find a better landing spot downstream—the accounts vary. But once back in the water, he drifted into faster water, swollen with snowmelt. McMinimy and Zander were scarcely able to pull him against the current. When they did, he went under water.

According to Project Air Officer **Delos Dutton** (MSO-51), in a note to smokejumpers, Smith came within five feet of the bank he originally had been on. McMinimy and Zander ran

downstream, still hanging onto the rope, but came to a rock wall.

They let go of the rope in the hope that Smith would be able to get to shore. But the rope became tangled in rocks, pulled him under and held him there. A helicopter was called in, picked up the two other men, but was unable to retrieve Smith's body. The next morning he had washed downstream.

His body wasn't found until May 13, a quarter-mile below the mouth of Clear Creek, about 700 yards from where he first entered the river. Mewhinney covered his friend's body with a blanket in the shallows and pulled him out.

Smith was the only jumper based at the Siskiyou Smokejumper Base from 1943 to 1981 to die on the job, although a pilot died in a crash in 1944.

Today a memorial flagpole and plaque stand out at the "Gobi," what the jumpers called their base, now being considered for designation as a historic site.

Smokejumper **Chuck Mansfield** (CJ-59), now of Los Alamos, N.M., said after Smith's funeral about 10 guys went to Larry's Drive-In and talked about the accident.

Smith had apparently tied a solid bowline, with no chance of loosening. He didn't have a knife. Mansfield said the men forgot to bring paddles, but Mewhinney said they never intended to use the raft for anything but their gear. The raft had been dropped by the river.

Former smokejumper **Gary Buck** (CJ-66) of Cave Junction said he spoke with Zander and McMinimy later in the summer of 1967.

"Rey literally started crying. It was tough on those two guys. They liked Tommy."

Many of the Siskiyou smokejumpers still hold a strong bond. They are proud of the lack of big wildfires during their years of work. They've done reunions in 1977, 2002, and 2006, and assembled a database to keep in touch. But no one's around who saw what happened on the Illinois River that day.

Zander drowned in a 1986 snorkeling accident in Westport, Wash., according to smokejumper records. The last anybody heard of McMinimy was 1977, his last year as a smokejumper, according to Buck.

"One of our jumpers works for the FBI," Buck said. "He tried to find McMinimy through his channels, and he couldn't even do it."

Late afternoon, May 5, 1967, Tommy's dad, George, was painting a fence. Floy was inside with 9-year-old Patricia, her youngest child. The Forest Service official drove up to the house in Grants Pass with the grim news.

"I said, 'Isn't there any hope he could be alive?' You're in shock. You don't believe it."

To this day Floy is bitter the two men let go of the rope. She wrote a letter to the Forest Service in Washington, D.C. She asked McMinimy shortly after her son's death why they

let go, and he reiterated that pulling on the rope made Tommy go under water. Fellow smokejumpers say it was just a bad accident.

Floy said the family used to go beachcombing quite a bit, and en route they'd often stop at the smokejumper base and go out to the flagpole.

George died in 1990 and is buried right next to Tommy at Hillcrest Cemetery, with a spot open for Floy. Floy faithfully visited Tommy's grave at Hillcrest on his birthday, July 23, and on May 5, for many years. She always saw flowers from someone else on the gravestone and didn't find out for 25 years that they had been left by **Glenda Marchant**.

Marchant rigged parachutes at the smokejumper base for more than 20 years, and her inlaws were buried near Tommy.

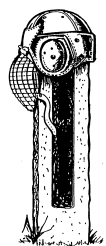
Marchant, now living in Coos Bay, said she fondly remembered Tommy Smith's blond hair and pleasant personality.

"It was devastating to have that happen to one of our boys," Marchant said. "I have empathy for his mother. We lost a son in a car accident 19 years ago."

Last June, Floy went to a smokejumper reunion at the base. She looked at old photos of her son and talked to some of his friends.

"She asked me if I knew her son," Buck said. "I said, 'Yes, he was a really good guy,' and she smiled. We went over and looked at a couple of photos of Tommy."

"It was funny, here were all these old guys with white hair and white beards," Floy said. "And Tommy is still 26 years old to me." 🕯



Off The List

We want to know! If you learn of the serious illness or death of a member of the smokejumper community, whether or not he or she is a member, your Association wants to know about it. Please

phone, write or e-mail the editor (see contact information on page three of the magazine). We'll take it from there.

Ben J. Lowman (Missoula '68)

Ben died October 23, 2007. He graduated from Montana State University and jumped at Missoula and West Yellowstone. Ben served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam and received three Bronze Stars, the Air Medal and the Purple Heart. After returning from the military, he began his career with the USFS working at the Missoula Technology and Development Center as a mechanical engineer, retiring in 2001 after 30 years.

Tedford P. Lewis (Missoula '43)

Tedford died November 20, 2007, in Webster Groves, Missouri. He was one of the original CPS-103 jumpers. He taught at the American University of Beirut in 1947-48 and traveled extensively in the Middle East before returning home to Webster, where he started a construction business. Tedford and his wife, Margaret, were leaders in local chapters of international peace organizations, including the

American Friends Service Committee, War Resisters League, and Fellowship of Reconciliation. They have been active members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Tedford was a founder of the World Community Center and gave generous support to causes that helped refugees and disadvantaged people around the world. (*Thanks to Dick Flaharty for this information.*)

Richard N. "Dick" Lehman (Missoula '45)

Dick died October 11, 2007, in Lancaster, PA. He was a CPS-103 jumper and active member of the Acts Covenant Fellowship Church. Besides jumping the 1945 season, Dick served as a mental hospital worker and a mariner on the cattle boats to Poland at the end of WWII during his CPS years. He later worked at the Landis Company for over 50 years as manager of the LP gas department. (*Thanks to Earl Schmidt for this information.*) 🕯

NSA Offers Gift Membership

by Carl Gidlund (Missoula '58)

Since you're a member of the NSA, you undoubtedly enjoy the benefits of membership in our association. Those include our quarterly magazine that provides you the latest news on issues of current interest to active and veteran smokejumpers plus a plethora of historic features.

NSA membership also gives you the chance to connect with old buddies at national and regional gatherings and to work with fellow jumpers on projects that benefit the national forests.

Now, through gift memberships, there's a way to share those

benefits with *non-member jumpers*. As a result of an action by the NSA board, current members can now purchase one-year half-price memberships for fellow jumpers. This is **\$15.00 for a 1-year membership**.

Gift memberships *are non-renewable at the half-price rate*. They may be purchased by mailing a check to NSA membership coordinator John McDaniel, P.O. Box 105, Falun, KS 67442-0105.

The purchaser must provide the NSA with the new member's correct address. And, the purchaser is also responsible for notifying the new member that he or she is making the gift. 🕯

Only In Alaska

by Tommy Albert (Cave Junction '64)

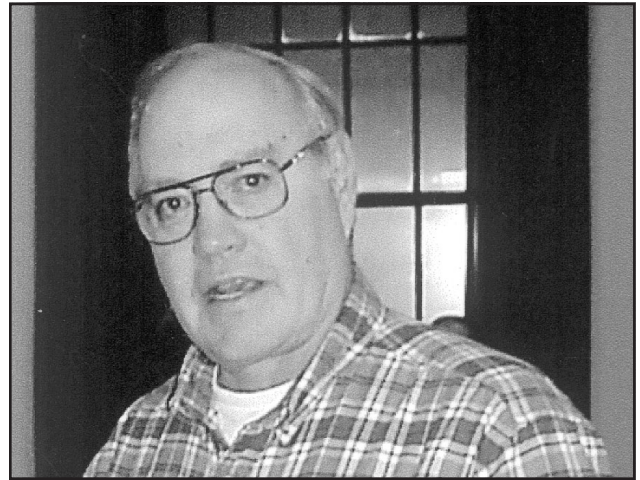
It was 1965 and I wanted to see the “last frontier.” Fairbanks had filled its jumper vacancies, so I applied to Anchorage and was hired. We reported to the fire office at some milepost of a road I can’t remember. It was located near a side gate to Elmendorf AFB. I was to be a McGrath jumper and was hired at the grade of IASS-5. What that stands for I have long forgotten, but the imagination offers some suggestions. It had something to do with GS pay plus a built in COLA.

Walt Rusk was the Chief. George Kitson was the head dispatcher. Jim Thurston was some kind of bigwig in fire. He later co-started the Office of Aircraft Services along with BLM Alaska’s Aviation Chief John McCormick. Bill Adams was the boss in McGrath where I was to be stationed. I can’t remember the names of the other boss types. There were eight of us jumpers, five returnees and three new guys (not rookies, mind you, just new to Alaska), **Ray Farinetti** (CJ-64), **Dennis Pearson** (MSO-62), and myself. We hired on in early April and went to Fairbanks for fire school. A pretty good school, I remember.

Toward the first of May, we flew to Fairbanks to refresh, and **Orv Looper** (CJ-49) greeted us with a surprise PT test. I sensed us Anchorage jumpers were considered stepchildren. Our physical training in Anchorage built up our right arms, but little else. We “new guys” passed the PT test. Having not prepared, we didn’t set any records, but Ray did hold the half-mile record till the college track stars showed up later. The three of us refreshed with the Fairbanks jumpers. The others had to stay in Fairbanks till they passed before refreshing.

Dennis, Ray, and I returned to Anchorage and had a great May, max-ing out for the next two pay periods on road-siders. It was during this time that I had my most unusual fire. I was sitting in the bunkhouse (WWII era quonset hut), and **Jim Thurston** (IDC-55) came in and said, “Tommy, I am sending you to Talkeetna tomorrow morning. There is a fire about 10 miles north of there along the Alaska Railroad. Be at Merrill Field at 0700 tomorrow with your fire gear and tools; oh, and also I want you to take one of the new Mighty Might pumps. Let us know what you think of it.” I asked who was going with me, and he said, “Just you.” I then asked how I was going to get to the fire, and he told me a guy would meet me at the airstrip in Talkeetna. This was a little different but not all that out of the ordinary for Alaska, I suspected. There were stories of Alaska jumpers waving down the train and hitching a ride back to town on the Alaska Railroad. That must be what’s in store for me.

As ordered, I was at the BLM hanger at 0700 and there was a waiting Cessna 180. The pilot, Jerry Chisum, and I loaded up the airplane and made the short flight up to



Tommy Albert (NSA file)

Talkeetna. When we landed, a small guy met the plane and helped me unload it. He introduced himself. Don Sheldon was his name. The name didn’t mean anything to me at the time as my concern was just how in the hell I was going to get to that fire with all that gear, including the mighty Mighty Might Pump.

Don Sheldon, by the way, turns out to be the world-renowned Alaska bush pilot, famous for his exploits on Mt. McKinley. He flew mountain climbers and landed them on the Ruth Glacier in his stripped down, ski equipped Cessna 180. Later, he’d fly up there in less than ideal conditions and rescue them. Don wrote the book, *Wager With The Wind*. A good read for those interested in aviation and Alaska. You know, Alaska, as big as it is, is a small world. One meets all kinds of interesting, and sometimes, famous people.

Don took me to a shed located on the sidetracks. He opened the door and there was an old hand trolley. Yew, you know, with the wobble hand “pump” mounted on a flat bed, four small train wheels underneath. I had seen them in the old silent movies. The picture I conjured up in my mind was of Laurel and Hardy on either side of the wobble pump, pumping as fast as they could with a steam engine bearing down on them while crossing a high trestle. Looking at the trolley and then at him alternately, I asked, “Is this how I am getting to the fire?” He said it was and told me to help him pull it out onto the main tracks. As we were loading my gear, I asked, “How do I know if there is a train coming or not?” He replied that he didn’t think there was one, which just gave me a real warm and fuzzy feeling. He didn’t THINK there was one coming... My skepticism was at a pretty high level about this time. You know, it doesn’t pay to be a new guy.

Don grabbed this lever and rotated it so that it pointed

in the direction of the fire. He then said, "When you're ready to come back, just reposition this lever toward Talkeetna and come on back." What could I do? I jumped up on it and started pumping. The boys back in the Lower 48 would never believe this.

Once you got it going, it really wasn't that hard to maintain a slow jogging speed. I was soon north of town, just me, the trolley, and my Mighty Might pump. On each curve, I would lean to the outside of the curve looking for an on coming train. Can't remember if I ever looked behind me. I had already formulated a plan that if I saw one coming, I was going to abandon the cart and let the train hit it. Hadn't quite figured what I was going to do if I was crossing a high trestle over the Susitna River system.

It was a nice, clear morning. The trees were well on their way to leafing out. Birds were flying. Pretty tranquil... Then the realization hit. Hell, this is Grizzly country! I got to wondering just how fast I could make this thing go so started pumping as hard as I could. Looked down at my "speed" and estimated it to be little more than half what a hungry Grizzly could run. Realized right then and there that if a bear came, I was breakfast. Like I said, it doesn't pay to be a new guy.

Don't recall how long it took me to get to the fire. I was a little preoccupied with thoughts of trains and bears, but the next thing I knew, there the fire was a short distance from tracks. It was just smoldering, most likely started by a passing train. So, I stopped and unloaded my tools. Gave some thought of pulling the trolley off the tracks, but quickly discounted that. I wasn't confident that I could get it back on by myself. If a train came, a train came, period.

I set up the

Mighty Might pump and the impeller disintegrated during the first five minutes of operation. The spare impeller met the same fate soon after I installed it. And to think, I lugged this thing what felt like halfway across Alaska. Took me the rest of the day to mop up the fire. Oh, and not a train one came by.

So, that evening I loaded the hand trolley back up, rotated the handle back towards Talkeetna, and started pumping my way back to town, again peering around each curve for an on coming train. I had long quit worrying about a bear, resigned to the fact that I would now be supper.

Looking back, it was a fun adventure but as adventures go, it would have been a lot more fun with a "jump" partner. With two people, we could have embellished this story until it became Alaska jumper folklore. As it is, just turns out to be a "different" way to get to a fire. And wouldn't you know, not a picture, one. 📷

Tommy Albert jumped in Oregon and Alaska for seven years and then moved over to the aviation side with BLM, OAS, and the USFS, retiring in August, 1999 as the North Zone Aviation Manager, Region 5. He and his wife, Kathy, now reside on the McKenzie River in Oregon. Tommy still flies fires as a contract pilot.



"Grandpa, I want to be a Smokejumper when I grow up." (Courtesy Bill Fogarty)